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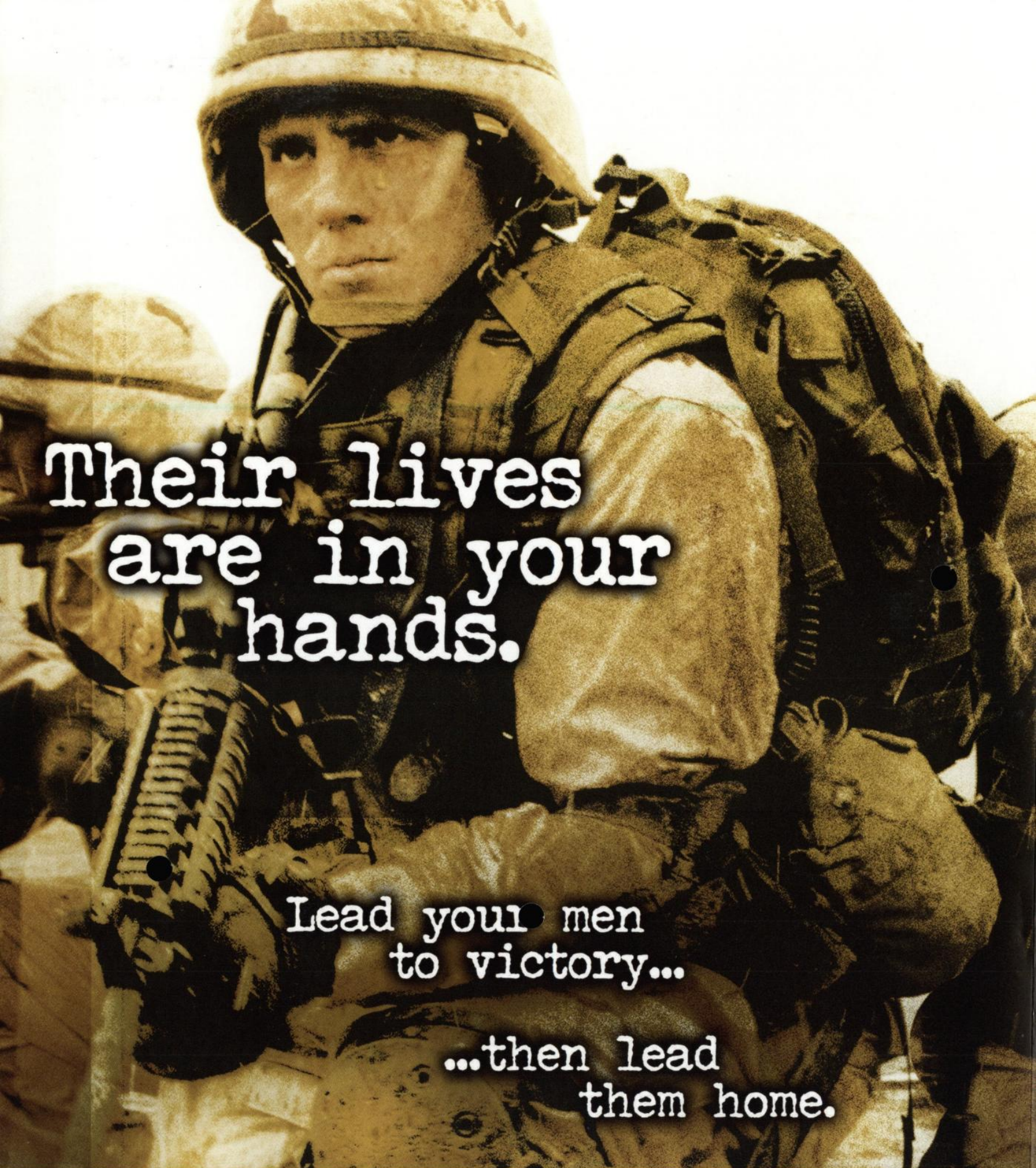


1 3




Highbury
Paragon

132
PAGES OF
FULL SPECTRUM
GAMING



Their lives
are in your
hands.

Lead your men
to victory...

...then lead
them home.



Based on a training aid
developed for the U.S. Army*

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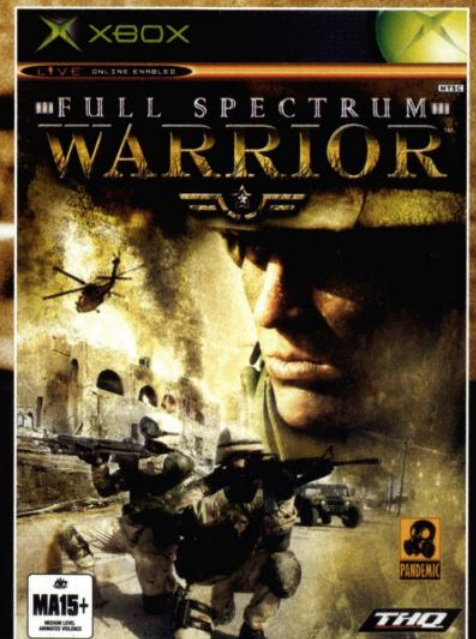
"...uncompromisingly realistic..."

- IGN.com

"The most realistic, tactical combat strategy game ever."

- Gamebiz.com.au

FULL SPECTRUM WARRIOR



It seems like just yesterday that Microsoft unveiled its new baby – the Xbox – to an expectant world videogames press. This year, at the Game Developers Conference, it unveiled the technology it hopes will drive its success in the next round of the console wars.

Will Xbox 2 consolidate the gains made by its predecessor or will Sony continue to dominate the market? Will Nintendo regain some of the ground it has lost? Will the drift towards 'mainstream' gaming (whatever that may be) continue? Only time – and perhaps E3 (our coverage starts next issue) – will tell.

Michael

Michael Butler, Group Editor

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Capcom re-invents
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again



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MICROSOFT UNLEASHES THE NEXT GENERATION AT GDC

THE FUTURE STARTS HERE

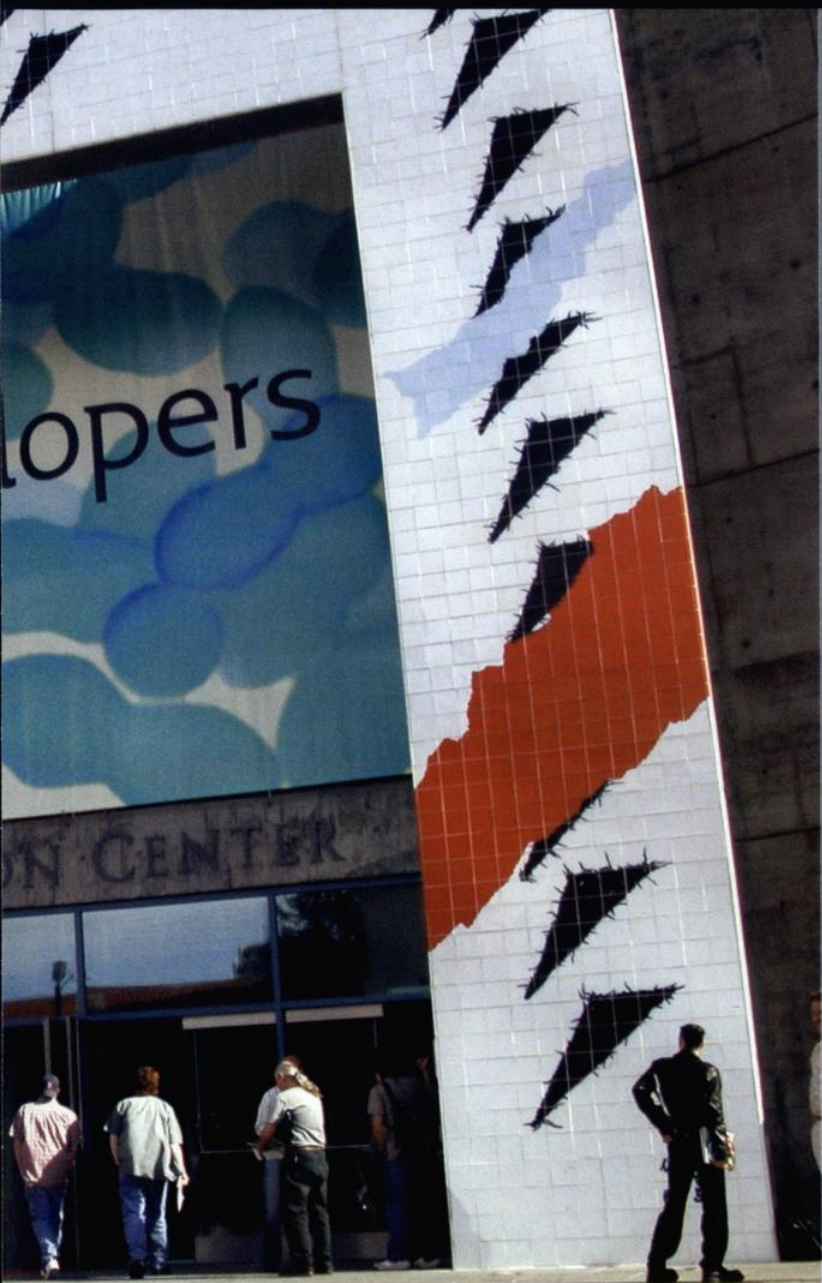
Although E3 is a key time to announce upcoming software, Microsoft instead used last month's Game Developers' Conference (GDC) in San José to showcase a tantalising glimpse of its plans.

While Microsoft didn't unveil the technical details for Xbox 2 that

everyone was expecting, it did reveal its brand new cross-platform development system. XNA will make it much easier for developers to create future Xbox and PC titles and comes with several interchangeable software tools – one of the most interesting allows developers to use all of Xbox Live's current services on future PC titles. This should make it

possible for Xbox and PC owners to eventually play against each other online and enable PC owners to act as hosts.

"At the heart of XNA is choice," said Microsoft's J Allard, corporate vice president of the Xbox. "No game today is built with just one tool, and no game tomorrow will be either. By creating an



environment where software innovations flourish and work together, XNA will allow game developers to redefine what's possible in games and gives gamers the freedom to pursue their own paths. XNA closes the gap between what gamers want and what developers dream."

In order to back up these brave claims, Microsoft unleashed three technical demos for Xbox 2 that give a clear indication of what we can expect from the new platform. Entitled *Crash*, *Film Noir* and *Xenomorph*, they displayed an impressive range of graphical techniques covering everything from morphing to advanced physics (you can see the screenshots on page 24).

One of the most obvious things we can expect from XNA is an increase in PC ports, but when Xbox owners have had to put up with lacklustre PS2 ports from many developers, this is no bad thing. "Software will be the single most important force in digital entertainment over the next decade," said Microsoft founder Bill Gates. "XNA underscores Microsoft's commitment to the game industry and our desire to work with partners to take the industry to the next level."

It's unclear if any information about Xbox 2 will be unveiled at this year's E3, but Microsoft has made an aggressive move which is sure to be counteracted by Nintendo and Sony. For full GDC and XNA coverage turn to page 22.



■ Anything Nintendo can do, Sony will try to do better.



■ *Res Evil* online – too bad we'll never see it over here.



EVERYONE LOVES XNA

MICROSOFT'S NEW TECHNOLOGY HAS GOT INDUSTRY BIGWIGS TALKING

JEZ SAN, FOUNDER AND CEO, ARGONAUT

■ "Anything that makes the game developer's life easier – and removes some of the risk and some of the trial and error – is a good thing."

ANDY THOMPSON, DIRECTOR OF STRATEGIC MARKETING, ATI TECHNOLOGIES

■ "We're excited to have been involved with XNA since its conception. We design hardware for developers so they get the high performance they expect under all circumstances, but it's equally important to provide software tools that remove the barriers to creating great content. The combination of ATI's hardware and Microsoft's XNA software will let game developers concentrate on what's most important: making blockbuster games."

JULIAN EGGBRECHT, PRESIDENT, FACTOR 5

■ "We are extremely excited about XNA, both as a middleware provider and as a game developer. Tools are the only chance for future success in this industry, and never has this been truer than now. As we move into next-generation development, the expectations of gamers and the abilities of hardware open almost limitless possibilities for content creators. Without the right tools, developers will not be able to keep up with the pace – XNA is what the industry needs right now."

DAVID LAU-KEE, CEO, CRITERION SOFTWARE

■ "We're pleased to see that Microsoft shares our vision of helping developers make better games, faster, through use of their favourite middleware."

CEVAT YERLI, PRESIDENT AND CEO, CRYTEK

■ "XNA is a great software solution that provides efficient tools, middleware and production pipelines to create better games faster. We fully approve and support this next-generation strategy, as effectiveness has been our ultimate goal since the establishment of Crytek and the development of CryENGINE middleware."

TIM SWEENEY, FOUNDER AND PRESIDENT, EPIC GAMES

■ "It's the age-old problem of game development: how much time do you spend on your tools and technology and how much time do you spend on your game design? The better the tools and technology, the better – and faster – you can make your game. The more Microsoft does to provide developers with tools, the easier it is for game developers to develop better games."

Data Stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



LARA'S LOOKING GOOD

After the disappointing *Tomb Raider: Angel Of Darkness*, Eidos is hoping that Lara's move to Crystal Dynamics will get her back on track. "We're still doing a lot of market research in terms of direction of the content and the character," said Eidos CEO Mike McGarvey. "However, the fundamental technology is already complete and the character is up and running in the environment with new moves and a new control system." We're sceptical about the so-called improvements, but anything will be better than AOD.



RUBIN DOES A RUNNER

Naughty Dog's studio president Jason Rubin will be moving on to pastures new once Jak III is completed. The revelation came at the recent DICE summit, where Rubin criticised publishers who don't give credit to developers. Rubin insisted, however, that his speech was not directed at Naughty Dog's owner, SCEA. "The speech was directed at the industry in general, not one company," he said. "In order to realise the goals I outlined in my talk, I need to expand my reach."



EyeToy has opened up the PS2 to a much wider audience.



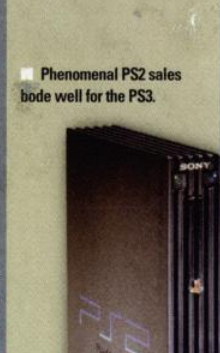
Popular franchises will help shift consoles.



Phenomenal PS2 sales bode well for the PS3.



Phenomenal PS2 sales bode well for the PS3.



Phenomenal PS2 sales bode well for the PS3.



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PlayStation 'wins next gen wars'

The war for supremacy between the next generation of game consoles is over and Sony has won, say analysts.

The Informa Media Group predicts that Sony will sell more than 30 million PlayStation 3s in Europe by 2010.

It puts Microsoft in second place with 10 million sales and Nintendo trailing in third with five million.

The new consoles, expected by 2005, will have much more processing power than current models and emphasise online gaming.

Online arena

The console market is big business, with Sony alone having sold more than 70 million PlayStation 2.

The Japanese electronics giant, together with rivals Microsoft and Nintendo, are now looking to the next generation of



Sony has sold more than 70 million PS2s

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TOP TECHNOLOGY STORIES NO

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MARKET RESEARCH SUGGESTS SONY'S PLAYSTATION3 HAS ALREADY WON THE NEXT-GEN BATTLE

OVER BEFORE IT'S BEGUN

If there's one thing we tire of easily, it's the inevitable war of statistics and figures that kicks off whenever a new generation of consoles is unveiled. So imagine our disappointment when a survey by the Informa Media Group suggested that Sony has not only won the next-generation console battle, but will completely obliterate its opposition, despite the fact that there isn't even a firm release date for any of the new machines.

Of course, research like this is inevitable, but when it starts getting posted by the likes of the BBC we can't help but wonder whether this is actually helping the industry in any way. "We decided to report on this as the subject is of interest to our readers," said Alfred Hermida, technology editor of BBC News Online. "Given Sony's track record

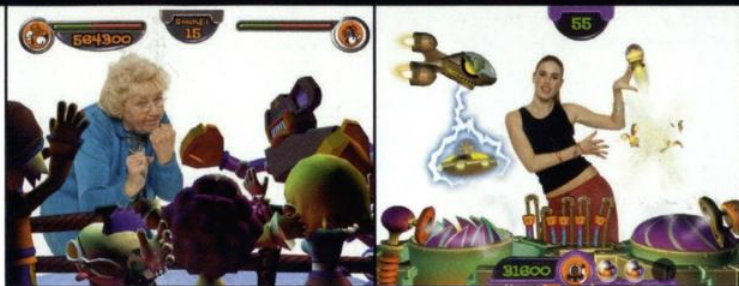
with the PlayStation2, it seems likely that it will enjoy similar success with its next generation console."

Despite the BBC stating that it's been made obvious that the news is not based on fact, we're not sure if the average consumer will see it the same way. Informa's Toby Scott, the author of the report, explained the whole story should be treated as nothing more than speculation. "Any work like this is dependent on a set of assumptions, which are given in detail in the report," he said. "I had extensive interviews with all the hardware companies, plus some leading software publishers and developers, and other industry analysts. The end result is as accurate as the assumptions and the model make it; we won't know for sure until 2010." Scott's report reveals that the PS3 is predicted

"WHILE IT WOULD BE FOOLISH TO DENY THAT PS3 WILL ENTER THE RACE WITH A HEAD START, MICROSOFT HAS ALREADY DEMONSTRATED THAT IT SEES THE XBOX BRAND AS A LONG-TERM PROPOSITION FOR THE COMPANY"

DOUG BONE, TRADING DIRECTOR, SIMPLYGAMES.COM





■ PlayStation2 is perhaps the most consumer-friendly console thanks to the family-oriented EyeToy.



■ Although the market research suggests the PS3 will be streets ahead of other consoles, Xbox 2 could do well too.

to have sold at least 30 million units in Europe by 2010 – a stark contrast to the 10 million Xbox 2s and 5 million N5s that Microsoft and Nintendo respectively are expected to shift.

Interestingly, many developers and publishers were reluctant to comment on Scott's revelations, with most simply stating that they are too busy concentrating on the current generation. But several developers were happy to reveal their own thoughts on the report, with Miles Jacobson of Sports Interactive going so far as to say: "I would suggest that this survey has the same factual basis as the MOD's documentation regarding Iraq before the war."

Scott is adamant, however, that surveys such as this are a crucially important factor for any company that wishes to plan its future. "Given the interest and sales we've had, I don't think the survey is premature at all," he said. "The nature of business information is forecasting sales and technology trends and it's something we and our rivals have been doing for years. None of us do it to make friends in the industry – we do it because our clients want reliable, well-explained data they can then use for business planning."

The fact of the matter is that it's simply way too early to predict what will happen. After all, who would have thought that Atari or Nintendo would ever have been displaced from their seemingly unshakable thrones? "While it would be foolish to deny that PS3 will enter the race with a head start, Microsoft has already demonstrated that it sees the Xbox brand as a long-term proposition for the company," said Doug Bone, trading director for simplygames.com. "Consumers have learned in recent years that Xbox is a fantastic gaming platform, so unlike the present battleground, for Xbox 2 Microsoft will at least be able to enter the arena with a degree of momentum."

Of course, we should never write off Nintendo, and while third-party support for the console continues to dry up, Bone is confident that it will be more than ready for the next generation. "Nintendo is, as ever, the enigma of the piece and, as demonstrated over the last Christmas period (when GameCube overperformed against market expectations), must never be ruled out. Whatever happens, I'm sure it'll be one hell of a scrap."

RENDERWARE GETS EVERYWHERE

With over 500 titles currently supporting Criterion's middleware, there's not enough room to list them all, so here are a few of the more recent examples...

BURNOUT 2

Criterion's excellent racer shows just how far its middleware software has been pushed. We expect *Burnout 3* to look even better.

PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 3

Konami is just one of many Japanese developers to use RenderWare, other notable examples include Hudson and the mighty SEGA.

SONIC HEROES

SEGA's mascot may have resurfaced in a rather average title, but RenderWare made it a simple task for him to move over to all three of the major platforms.

GRAND THEFT CITY AUTO: VICE CITY

The award-winning *Vice City* is still going strong and has been further revitalised by its move to the Xbox. It's unknown if *San Andreas* will use RenderWare, but it seems pretty likely.

MORTAL KOMBAT 5: DEADLY ALLIANCE

It might be showing its age compared to the likes of *Soul Calibur II* and *Dead Or Alive 3*, but it's still a huge improvement on previous incarnations

RENDERWARE EXTENDS ITS REACH AS CRITERION ANNOUNCES NEW MIDDLEWARE PLANS



RENDERWARE STORY

Criterion Software is regarded as one of the most advanced middleware developers in the industry, so it came as no surprise that it used the Game Developers' Conference to show off the next generation of its RenderWare technology. RenderWare4 was one of the biggest talking points of the show, mainly because its focus is on the next generation of consoles. "RenderWare4 has been squarely targeted at what next-generation games will bring: massive data sets, parallelism in architecture and huge calls on visual effects," said Criterion's Adam Billyard. "When Criterion began planning for new hardware two years ago, it was obvious that an iteration of current-generation technology simply wouldn't deliver."

As well as revealing RenderWare4, Criterion also announced a new RenderWare toolchain for the PSP and a collaboration with major silicon manufacturers to produce middleware for mobile phone games. Lincoln Wallen of RenderWare Mobile sees Criterion's involvement as a way to push mobile gaming to even higher levels. "This is a significant part of our strategy to ensure that developers and publishers are able to deliver content efficiently for current and next-generation gaming platforms," he said.

While we're excited to see Criterion and other big companies building the foundations for the future, we just hope they don't forget that there's still plenty of life left in the current generation of consoles and phones.



Data Stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



EYETOY GOES HARRY POTTY

Electronic Arts has revealed that its next *Harry Potter* title will feature Sony's innovative EyeToy. It would appear that players will be able to wear Hogwarts' sorting hat and take part in all manner of *Harry Potter*-themed mini-games. Although unlikely to appeal to the more mature gamer, it's great to see EA trying something different and we hope to see other developers use the device in a similar way. While *EyeToy: Play* was a massive success, the follow-up, *Groove*, didn't achieve the same status. Let's hope *EyeToy: Sports* can rectify this.



CODEMASTERS HEADHUNT

Thanks to a record financial year that saw a turnover of \$185 million, Codemasters has decided to go on a spending spree and is urging developers to step forward with their unpublished games. "We would be delighted to hear from developers with unsigned titles, or those not satisfied with their current publishing arrangements," said Nick Wheelwright, Codemasters' managing director. The firm is currently signing new titles for all current consoles, as well as Xbox 2 and Sony's PSP and PlayStation3.



Will the DS sell better than the GameCube?

THE STATS

CPU CORE
Main Processor: ARM946E-S (67 MHz)
Cache: 8Kb for instructions, 4Kb for data
TCM: 32Kb for instructions, 16Kb for data
Sub Processor: ARM7TDMI (33 MHz)

MEMORY
Main Memory: 4Mb (8Mb in the debugger)
ARM9/ARM7 Shared: 38Kb (2 x 16Kb)
ARM7 Internal Work RAM: 64Kb
VRAM: 656Kb

LCD
Screen Size: 256 x 192, RGB pixels, two screens
Number of Colours: 262,144 (18-bit colour)

2D GRAPHICS ENGINE (A, B)
Backgrounds: Up to four layers
Objects: Up to 128 sprites

3D GRAPHICS ENGINE
Co-ordinate Conversion Ability: Up to 4 million vertices/second
Polygon Drawing Ability: Up to 120,000 polygons/second
Pixel Drawing Ability: Up to 30 million pixels/second

SOUND
16-channel ADPCM/PCM (up to 8 channels of PSG can be established)
Microphone input

WIRELESS COMMUNICATION
Original protocol based on IEEE802.11

INPUT DEVICE
Touch-panel
Digital pad, A, B, R, L, Start, Select (X and Y are under examination)

POWER CONTROL
Can deal with sleep mode (wake-up is possible at a chosen time interval or by wireless reception), 2D engine, rendering engine, geometry engine and the LCD's power control

NINTENDO REVEALS THE STATS BEHIND ITS NEW MACHINE

A TOUCH OF CLASS

As E3 draws closer, speculation about Nintendo's new handheld is spreading like wildfire. Numerous Japanese developers have announced their support for the machine, and their excited comments about the DS have started to filter back to us. Recent interviews in Japan's popular console magazine *Famitsu* suggest there will be a lot of satisfied customers when the machine is finally unveiled.

"We've been waiting for this," said Sonic Team's Yuji Naka. "We'll definitely want to be releasing something in time for launch." Amusement Vision's Toshihiro Nagoshi also has high hopes for the machine: "This is a machine that will stimulate both the users' and the creators' desire to play," he revealed. "It should allow the birth of a whole host of new ideas and play experiences that haven't existed before."

These claims have been bolstered by the recently released stats, which show grand plans for the machine. The most exciting news is that the DS (the name Nitro having been dismissed by Nintendo) will feature a touch-sensitive panel, complete with PDA-style stylus. This could open up a new playing

field for the next generation of handheld consoles, and when you consider that the machine will also feature wireless technology the possibilities are potentially endless. "It [the DS] will introduce a refreshing new experience if it's played by one person alone," Nintendo president Satoru Iwata told the Mainichi Interactive website. "But we're hoping that it will be even more fun when played with multiple people."

Iwata-san also explained how he feels the next generation is progressing. "Creating complicated games with advanced graphics used to be the golden principle that led to success, but it's no longer working," he said. "It's obvious that there's no future to gaming if we continue to run on this principle that wastes time and energy [in development]. Nintendo is called 'conservative' and 'quiet' nowadays, so we hope to show our existence as an innovator to new styles of entertainment."

Whether Iwata-san's claims come true remains to be seen, but with just a few weeks to go until the DS's official unveiling our interest in this revolutionary machine has been properly piqued.

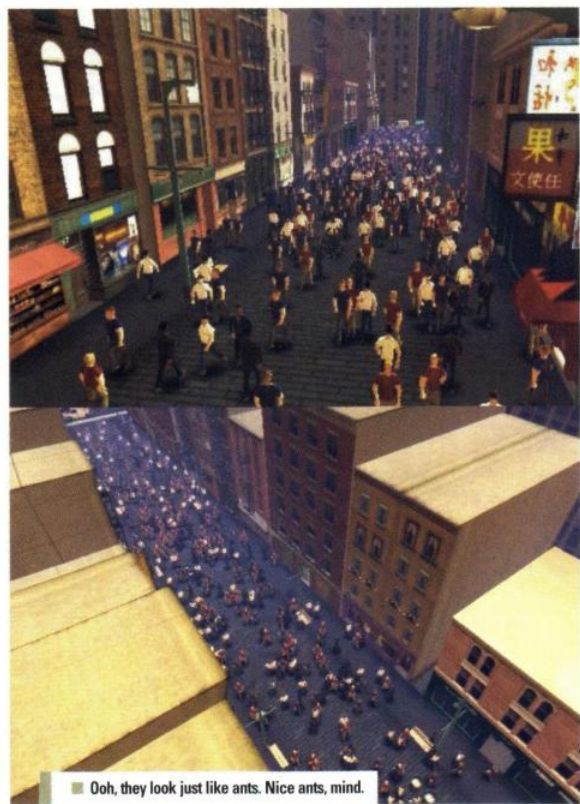
LT STUDIOS REVEALS ITS BRAND
NEW GRAPHICS ENGINE

MYRIAD MARVEL

As the ideas behind games becomes ever more complex, so too do the graphics engines that are needed to power them. The latest engine from LTStudios, entitled Myriad, features hundreds of characters that all move independently and is already looking very advanced. Although the current demos only show people moving through a congested street, the statistics are nevertheless impressive and bode well for future games.

The rolling demo has 500 lit, skinned and fogged people exploring the busy environment and currently runs at a solid 60 frames per second. The figures follow 500 different AI decision paths and feature totally separate animations. LTStudios, a subsidiary of Argonaut, has stated that these people can be replaced with anything from animals to vehicles, so the possibilities this creates for future games built with the engine are very interesting. "In Myriad we have created a highly adaptable engine and toolset which, as far as we know, can handle higher volumes of moving characters than any other engine that's currently available," said Andrew Parsons, MD of LTStudios. "We're already using many of the features of Myriad in the prototypes that we have under development."

It's already been revealed that Myriad is being used for a new racing game prototype, and providing it steers clear of any *State Of Emergency*-type affairs, the engine could have a bright future.



■ Ooh, they look just like ants. Nice ants, mind.

games™ THE TOP FIVE

CRAP JOBS, BUT GOOD GAMES



No.5 FARMER

Hey, it worked for *Harvest Moon*...



No.4 PAPERBOY

As easy as riding a bike? Yeah, right



No.3 TAXI DRIVER

Are you talkin' to me?



No.2 SANITATION WORKER

A dirty job, but someone's got to do it



No.1 FOOTBALL MANAGER

Hardest job in the world, apparently

>> NEWS | N-GAGE QD | ROOM 101



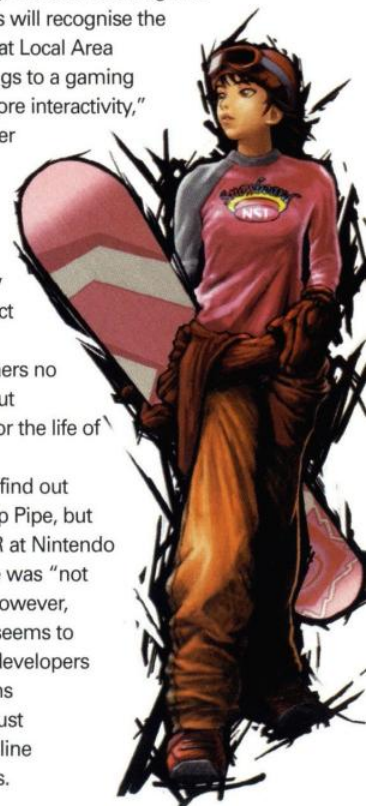
THE LATEST VERSION OF WARP
PIPE IS UP AND RUNNING

AT WARP SPEED

While Nintendo avoids the online fever that's sweeping the 128-bit scene, Warp Pipe Technologies continues to take the GameCube to a place where no Nintendo console has gone before. Warp Pipe 3.0 is now available for PC and Mac users who wish to take their GameCube online. Although Nintendo has only officially released three games to work with its LAN hardware – *Kirby Air Ride*, *1080° Avalanche* and *Mario Kart: Double Dash!!* – Warp Pipe hopes that more developers will use the feature.

"In a time where most GameCube implementations of a multiplatform release are void of many features, including online gameplay, we believe that game developers and publishers will recognise the significant added value that Local Area Network functionality brings to a gaming community hungry for more interactivity," said Chad Paulson, founder of Warp Pipe Technologies. "I think the advent of Warp Pipe technology combined with the LAN functionality is a very attractive prospect for gamers and manufacturers, as publishers no longer have to worry about subsidising online costs for the life of a videogame."

We were interested to find out Nintendo's views on Warp Pipe, but Shelly Pearce, Head of PR at Nintendo Europe, revealed that she was "not aware of this product". However, Warp Pipe's community seems to have hit its stride, and if developers take Paulson's suggestions seriously it would show just how out of touch with online gaming Nintendo really is.



Data Stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



RAINBOW GAMING

We've lost track of the amount of different coloured GBAs that have been released in the last year so we're not surprised to see Microsoft and Sony pulling the same tricks. Microsoft's 'Elite Force' pack features a green Xbox and controller (and a copy of Halo) and Sony has confirmed two more colours for PS2 owners in Japan. The Ceramic White PS2 is very similar to last year's PS2 racing pack, while the Sakura PS2 is new and looks very similar to Cherry Blossom. There's no word yet on an Australian release for either machine.



■ The Doom-esque *Ashen* is a gothicky blaster.



■ *Pocket Kingdom* is an ambitious MMORPG.



■ *The Sims* is already a hit – can it work on the QD?



CHEATS NEVER PROSPER

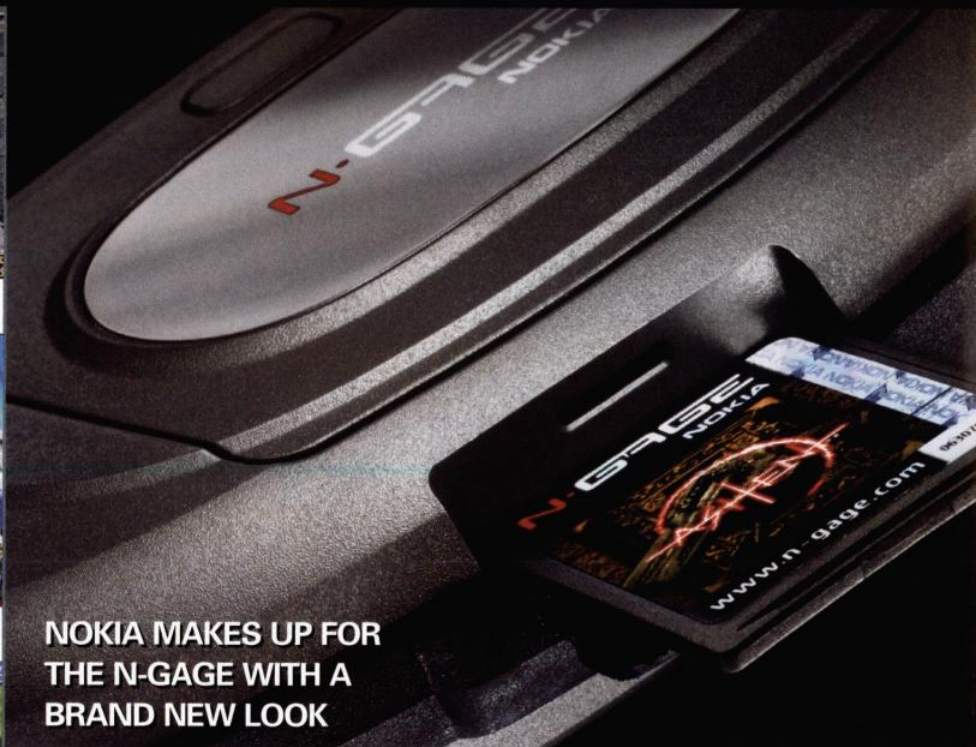
Fans of popular online game *StarCraft* had reason to celebrate recently when Blizzard got tough and shut down the accounts of 263,000 known cheats. If that wasn't enough, *WarCraft III* saw 19,000 accounts being banned, with 8,000 CD Keys that were linked to the accounts being suspended from the game's Ladder Play. Anyone who's played online will tell you how cheaters can ruin any gaming session, so it's great to see Blizzard taking such firm action. Hopefully other developers will take note and take similar measures to stop a minority spoiling our fun.



SEPARATED AT BIRTH

games™ tracks down those videogame lookalikes

Stick some pointy ears on *Love Actually* star Thomas Sangster and he could almost be Hyrule hero, Link. Ooh, scary.



NOKIA MAKES UP FOR THE N-GAGE WITH A BRAND NEW LOOK

IF AT FIRST YOU DON'T SUCCEED...

Nokia has finally revealed that an update for its N-Gage is ready and waiting to be unleashed. The N-Gage QD is a refined version of the original model and it would appear the mobile-phone giant has listened to many of the complaints that were levelled at the first machine. Of course, it was always obvious that a follow-up would appear, although no-one was expecting to see it announced so soon after the original N-Gage.

Although the N-Gage QD looks very similar to its forerunner, it does have several key differences that should help endear it to the more casual gamer. The most important improvement is the ability to swap games over in the same way you would on a Game Boy Advance rather than having to take the back off the phone-cum-console. Battery life has also been improved and the cumbersome (and ridiculous) need to hold the phone sideways to make calls will no longer be an issue, thanks to the inclusion of an earpiece on the front of the handset.

The overall size of the machine has also been reduced and Nokia has dispensed with the sharp angles of the original machine. Unfortunately, the disappointing screen layout remains, yet Mark Squires, director of corporate communications at Nokia UK, is adamant that this isn't an issue.

"The shape of the screen is irrelevant," Squires says. "It's the use of the games that are important. Some are better side-screen while others are better up-screen." However, anyone who's played the likes of *Sonic* will know how frustrating it is to play certain titles regardless of their layout.

Unsurprisingly, Nokia has yet to reveal how much the QD will cost and when it will actually launch, but Squires has hinted that we can expect a much lower price than the N-Gage. When you consider that consumer-friendly features like the MP3 player and radio have now been dropped, it's no surprise that we'll be able to spend a little less on what we felt was originally a rather extravagant purchase. Squires, however, thinks that the N-Gage was always reasonably priced. "The original N-Gage incorporated console-quality gaming, an MP3 player, FM radio and tri-band mobile phone – its price point offered fantastic value for money for this level of functionality," he says.

When it debuted in October last year, the N-Gage immediately came under fire due to its poor design – it was difficult and time-consuming to change games, and making a call meant holding the handset awkwardly. Nevertheless, Nokia feels that the first iteration of the N-Gage



■ Battery life has been improved, but the screen is still an awkward shape for some types of game.



■ The whole design of the handset has been modified to take away some of the original model's clunkiness.



■ Importantly, changing games won't involve removing the back of the machine.

was nothing but a success. Around the world, "we sold 600,000 over the holiday period, representing a strong performance and confirming that the N-Gage is a concept that excites gamers," says Squires. "As with all new consoles we have come in for some criticism, but our sales show that we have tapped into the imagination of gamers and are delivering a product that excites and inspires them. The N-Gage is a unique proposition and we are leading the mobile gaming market."

It may have had a questionable start as far as gamers were concerned, but at least Nokia is willing to show that it is happy to respond to criticism. Ultimately, however, we can't help feeling that the N-Gage QD is a classic example of 'too little, too late' and will do little to change the public's perception of Nokia's current gaming endeavours. Squires is vehement, however, that this is simply not the case. "The N-Gage QD demonstrates our commitment to the games industry and our ability to respond to public feedback much faster than the industry is used to," he says.

While we find it admirable that Nokia has moved so swiftly to address the original N-Gage's shortcomings, we can't help but feel that if it had managed to get the design right in the first place, none of this would have been necessary.

"IT MAY HAVE HAD A BAD START IN THE GAMING WORLD, BUT THIS SHOWS THAT NOKIA IS HAPPY TO RESPOND TO CRITICISM"

THREE TO LOOK FORWARD TO

It's safe to say that the N-Gage's release list has been average at best and has seriously lacked original content. Fortunately, Nokia has rectified this and upcoming titles will focus on the N-Gage's key features, namely multiplayer gaming. For the moment, though, let's look at some of the more promising titles that are on the way...

Ashen

Similar to *Doom* and *Quake*, *Ashen* is a gothic horror-filled blaster that promises to improve on all the faults of the N-Gage's *Red Faction II*. It's already looking impressive and will allow deathmatches for up to four players. There's also a Ghost Vision mode that enables players to uncover previously hidden monsters and objects.

The Sims Bustin' Out

An update of the excellent GBA version, *Bustin' Out* should be just the thing for gamers on the move. There are lots of tasks to complete in order to unlock items and money, and we're expecting the QD to use its Bluetooth ability. There's a huge selection of NPCs to interact with and EA has promised that the N-Gage version will feature new items and mini-games that are exclusive to the platform.

Pocket Kingdom

This has the potential to be huge – Nokia and SEGA are collaborating on the world's first mobile MMORPG. Games will allow players to take part in huge online battles. It's definitely one of Nokia's most ambitious titles and gives a clear indication of where it wants to take mobile gaming. Let's just hope that it's a direction that gamers want to take as well.

GAMES ROOM 101

THE NEGATIVE SIDE OF VIDEOGAMING

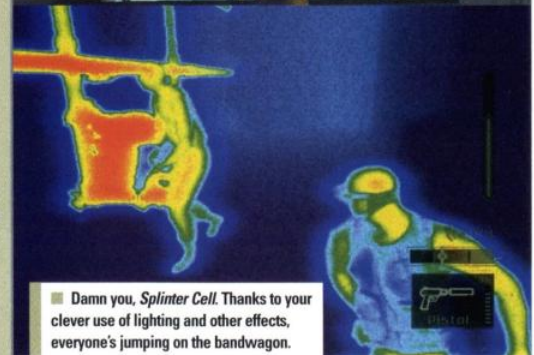
NO.13: THIS SEASON'S FAVOURITE

Obviously, we've moaned about the problem of bandwagon jumping countless times before, but things have begun to get worse. For example, we've started seeing a flock of games using various 'popular' ideas purely for the sake of it – taking concepts introduced by a handful of titles and sticking them in simply so they can be used as a unique selling point.

Of course, exactly what today's favourite concept is takes some guessing; some would say it's ragdoll physics (which virtually every enemy-based game seems to feature) while others might favour complex lighting. Or how about specialist 'goggle' effects like heat- or night-vision? Thankfully, cel-shading appears to have had its day, but that just means that other overused nuances are coming to the fore.

What makes things worse, though, is that most of the games using such ideas don't even do them as well as the games they're copying, let alone improve on them; from *Bad Boys II*'s ridiculously exaggerated ragdoll system to *Alias*' rather dodgy attempt at stealth, it's just another case of developer complacency. But here's a thought – what about coming up with something original? It's not like it hasn't been done before...

■ *Bad Boys II* – an example of how something like ragdoll physics is utterly overused.



■ Damn you, *Splinter Cell*. Thanks to your clever use of lighting and other effects, everyone's jumping on the bandwagon.

Data Stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



YOU'RE ON YOUR OWN NOW

The future looks increasingly bleak for Nintendo's GameCube as the number of Western publishers choosing not to release their major multiformat titles on the struggling console continues to grow. The latest blow comes as both Electronic Arts and Codemasters have refused to create a Cube version of their officially licensed football titles that will accompany the Euro 2004 Championships (*UEFA Euro 2004* and *England International Football* respectively). With no Cube titles in the pipeline from the likes of Eidos, Atari and LucasArts, it looks like Nintendo's E3 showing will rely almost entirely on enticing sequels from its own stable. But will their quality be enough to support the machine?



■ No more AV for you...



■ ...if you're in Japan.



"say what you see"

Meaningless waffle from the industry

THIS MONTH Guerilla's managing director, Herman Hulst, speaks about the recently inked exclusivity deal with Sony Europe

"We are looking forward to working exclusively with SCE, in order to establish Guerilla as one of the finest development studios in Europe"

games™ says: No doubt the gigantic cheque that Sony wrote you will come in handy too. Talk about spoiling other people's plans though – what now for Eidos' *Shellshock: Nam 67*, eh?

MORE FROM MR CHIPS NEXT MONTH!



AV OUT

THE CUBE UNDERGOES A COSMETIC CHANGE...

Import fans used to having their GameCube titles being compatible with HDTV and progressive scan will be upset to learn that the Digital AV port is to be dropped from Japanese versions of the machine. The reason for the change isn't clear, though it does coincide with a price drop for most of Nintendo's Japanese products. In response to Japanese legislation stating that products in shops must be displayed with a price that includes five per cent sales tax (so a ¥200 item would now seem to cost ¥210), Nintendo has dropped its prices. A GameCube's ¥14,000 price remains unchanged, though this figure now includes the sales tax. However, any

Nintendo products released before 22 March this year will be subject to the sales tax. So has the AV port been dropped in order to cut costs? Quite possibly.

A limited number of Cubes with the AV port will still be made, but otherwise the feature now looks redundant. It's not yet been revealed if developers will be dropping HDTV and progressive scan from future titles, but judging by how good games like *Metroid Prime* can look in progressive scan we're expecting the option to remain.

Consoles go through hardware changes all the time, with the most recent example being Sony's removal of the little-used i-Link port from the PlayStation2, so we're hardly surprised to see Nintendo getting rid of such an underused feature.

MICROSOFT REVEALS NEW STAFF

NEW MEN AT MICROSOFT

Following the departure of Ed Fries from Microsoft, Shane Kim has been announced as the new acting manager for Microsoft Game Studios. Kim will oversee huge titles like *Halo 2* and *Perfect Dark Zero* and will report to Peter Moore, who has been appointed head of worldwide content and marketing for Microsoft games and game products.

Microsoft's chief Xbox officer, Robbie Bach, announced the appointments, saying that the new crew would enable Microsoft to concentrate on building its growth in the retail and gaming markets.

"Peter Moore has been a key figure in the games industry for several years," said Bach. "Having him at the helm of our global marketing and content business is a natural fit." Moore was previously president and COO of SEGA of America and joined Microsoft at the beginning of 2003. Shane Kim, on the other hand, has been with Microsoft for eight years having joined the company as an intern.

With the next generation of consoles moving ever closer, we're not surprised to see restructures such as this. Don't be surprised if other companies bring in fresh blood to prepare for the future.

SONY BEATS MICROSOFT AT ITS OWN GAME

XBOX LIVE? NO THANKS...

The console war is a bitter business, with all three major companies constantly using pages of figures and statistics to make their machines seem more popular than the other consoles.

With Microsoft and Nintendo both being extremely pleased with recent figures for Xbox Live and sales of the GameCube, Sony has announced its own figures that put its rivals to shame. It's been revealed that over 25

million PlayStation2s have now been sold in the US, with 2.6 million of the machines online-enabled. On top of this, Sony has stated that over a million gamers are currently using its PS2 Online service.

"While our competitors strive to meet the new standards we've laid before them, our focus remains fixed on driving the momentum of our platform and the industry forward," announced SCEA's president, Kaz

Hirai. This is sure to be a bitter pill for Microsoft to swallow, as it's recently been celebrating the fact that Xbox Live now has over 750,000 users, which doesn't look so impressive now compared to PS2 Online.

Of course, Microsoft has not revealed the percentage of Live kits sold in relation to machines, but this latest news suggests that it will be wanting the likes of *Halo 2* and *Doom III* to appear sooner rather than later...

THE TRUTH WILL OUT

Try as it might to play its *San Andreas* cards close to its chest, Rockstar can't keep the smallest of tidbits leaking out. Thanks to a casting call through LA agency Shadowfax, three characters for the game and a rough idea of settings have become apparent. Maccer, Mad Dogg and Maria are the trio in question – for audition purposes, characters and lines have been chosen from *Human Traffic*, *Menace II Society* and *Colors*, leading many to believe that the game will enjoy a mid-Nineties setting. Naturally, Rockstar remains tight-lipped as ever...



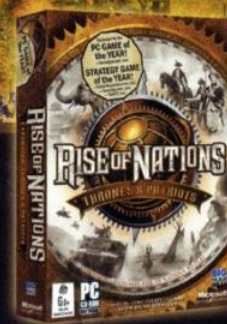
TAKE YOUR TYRANNY TO A NEW PLACE.



'Thrones and Patriots' is the new expansion pack to Rise of Nations. Six new nations, five new military units, three new wonders and countless new opportunities to inflict your tyranny as you strive for world domination. Available now from all PC game retailers.

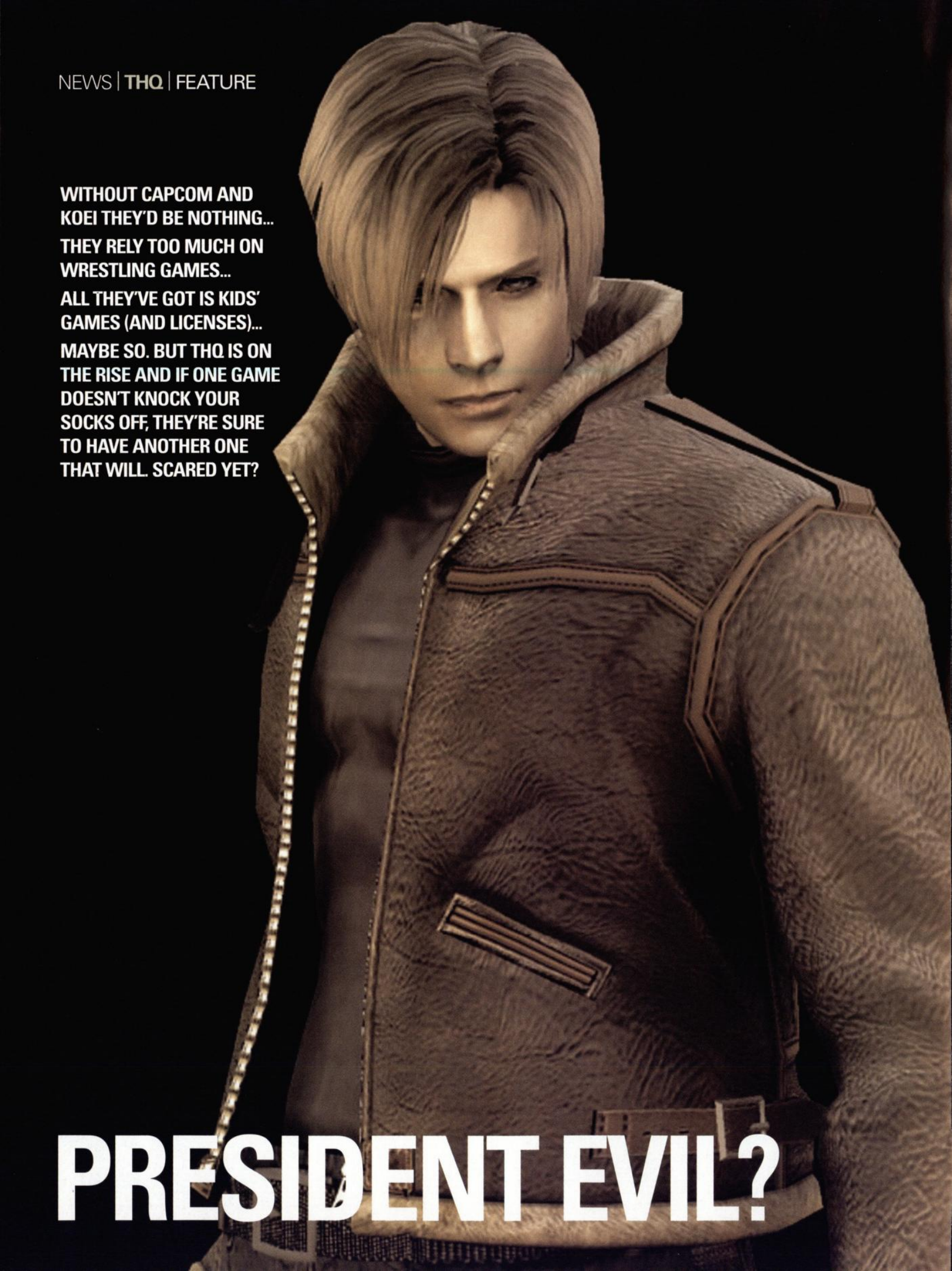


MAKE HISTORY



NEWS | **THQ** | FEATURE

WITHOUT CAPCOM AND
KOEI THEY'D BE NOTHING...
THEY RELY TOO MUCH ON
WRESTLING GAMES...
ALL THEY'VE GOT IS KIDS'
GAMES (AND LICENSES)...
MAYBE SO. BUT THQ IS ON
THE RISE AND IF ONE GAME
DOESN'T KNOCK YOUR
SOCKS OFF, THEY'RE SURE
TO HAVE ANOTHER ONE
THAT WILL. SCARED YET?



PRESIDENT EVIL?

BRIAN FARRELL

MOVING ON UP

THQ IS A PUBLISHER ON THE MOVE. NUMBER THREE IN THE MARKETPLACE OVERALL (AND THE NUMBER TWO INDEPENDENT), IT'S GEARING UP FOR A MAJOR ASSAULT ON THE HEARTS AND MINDS OF VIDEOGAME ENTHUSIASTS THE WORLD OVER. CHAIRMAN, PRESIDENT AND CEO BRIAN FARRELL SPOKE EXCLUSIVELY TO GAMES™ ON HIS RECENT VISIT TO AUSTRALIA

games™: Why do you think THQ has been so successful?

BF: To be successful in this business you have to marry two things – great entertainment content, you have to have some great products. We've done a lot on a corporate basis with our development process but the other thing is a very focused team in terms of the publishing side of the business; developing good relationships with retail, developing good relationships with the press, getting the word out. So you have to do both: you have to have great products and you have to execute very well on the publishing side.

games™: Should the hardware cycle be longer? Would a 5–6 or even 7 year cycle be better than the 3–4 year cycle we have now?

BF: Well to be fair we now look at the hardware cycles as being 7 or 8 years. Sony is even talking about the PS2 having a 10 year life cycle. Looking at the PSOne there are still reasonable levels of sales in the ninth or tenth year of the cycle. So yes, there is the introduction of new platforms every 5 to 6 years, but we see a huge market opportunity continuing on PS2 and Xbox well into 2008, maybe even 2009 and so we intend to continue developing products for the existing platforms well into those periods.

We're investing heavily to be one of the leaders in the next gen, but that doesn't mean we're taking the existing technology... if you look at our strategy it's fairly obvious but I'll point out the obvious – we're very strong in the family category, with things like *Finding Nemo* – 4 million units sold in its life to date, over 120 000 here in Australia alone – a family title, based on a fairly young-looking franchise... it's that consumer that's going to dominate PS2 and Xbox as the new early adopter, the core gamer moves on to Xbox2 and PS3 in 2005, 2006.

So what we're going to do, we're going to exploit that family category, that real mass-market gamer, on the existing platforms till 2008, 2009. And we're going to be very aggressive, attacking the core gamer on the new platforms beginning when the platforms launch, perhaps as early as 2005.

games™: What implications does that have for the allocation of developers? Or do you just get bigger?

BF: We've actually gotten much bigger. Going into the last platform transition we had one internal studio that had about 30 people; going into this platform transition we have seven studios with about 300

people. For example, here in Studio Australia, we've gone from a standing start and in 15 months we've got over 30 people and we'll bring that up to somewhere around 60 people by the end of next year, maybe more. We've contracted with independent developers so we're growing internal development and we're also going to grow external development.

games™: For how long can the PS2 compete against the Xbox, given the Xbox's superior specs?

BF: I think PS2's going to be extremely viable. It's the dominant market force through this cycle. Particularly as the price points come down, we look at Sony to continue leading the market through this cycle. Next cycle? The next cycle will be very interesting. As a game developer and publisher we're absolutely platform agnostic. You know, we want to see two equally-balanced sides at war and we're the arms supplier to both sides. We don't want anybody to win; we don't want anybody to lose. That's not being politically correct – it's in our best interests for them to be fighting it out, for it to be 51/49.

games™: Would it be better for you if there was one dominant console?

BF: Absolutely not. That market dynamic expands the market, reducing console prices, providing development or marketing dollars to publishers like us... having that competition is crucial to keeping those dynamics going. We love a two-platform market.

games™: You're talking about 2 platforms. What about Nintendo?

BF: Well, historically our links have been very strong with Nintendo. We've been the top GameCube publisher, we're the number-one publisher on Game Boy Advance worldwide, but as I said before we're platform-agnostic. Nintendo needs to respond more aggressively to their marketplace. Historically they've had that 6 to 15 year old gamer. I think they lost their way with that gamer and have lost that market now to Sony. Nintendo has to decide how they're going to regain that market and what their strategy is. Is it too late? I don't know, but it's going to be a difficult environment for Nintendo unless they capture the core demographic before trying to reach out to others.

games™: Will the DS help Nintendo?

BF: Frankly, I began, and we began as a company, fairly sceptical about the DS. But we've come full circle on that. Being the leading Game Boy publisher,



From console classics like *Viewtiful Joe* to hardcore PC titles like *S.TALKER*, THQ has games for all corners.



"WE WANT TO SEE TWO EQUALLY BALANCED SIDES AT WAR AND WE'RE THE ARMS SUPPLIER TO BOTH SIDES."

BRIAN FARRELL
CHAIRMAN, PRESIDENT AND
CEO, THQ INC.

WHO IS BRIAN FARRELL?

Brian joined THQ in April 1991 as vice president, chief financial officer and treasurer. He was elected to his current positions (Chairman, President and CEO) in January 1995. Prior to joining THQ he was vice president and chief financial officer of Hotel Investors Trust, a New York Stock Exchange company. Previously he was employed by Deloitte & Touche LLP. Brian holds a bachelor's degree from Stanford University and an MBA from the University of California, Los Angeles.

Nintendo's been quite aggressive in terms of showing us technology and showing us their plans for DS. We're actually quite impressed with the potential for DS. The question mark for Nintendo is how are they going to position the product, how are they going to price it, how are they going to promote it. As a piece of hardware it's actually something that's sort of bizarre-looking at first but I think it looks quite interesting now. But Nintendo really needs to nail the price point and the position in the market place and how they communicate that to the consumer. If they can do that effectively then I think the hardware has a good shot.

games™: Do you have plans to support the PSP?

BF: We love PSP. It looks like an extension of the market. Game Boy Advance, as you know, is mostly a younger demographic, 6 to 15, core Nintendo. The PSP looks to be aimed at a much older demographic so from our perspective it'll expand the market. Once again, what's the price point? We think we know a little more about the initial positioning; the Walkman of the 21st century. We don't know the business model yet so there's a lot of unknowns. We think Sony's going to be very aggressive in promoting PSP.

It's a major corporate initiative and we'll support it very aggressively; we've announced that we've got 4 titles in development and in fact we'll probably put more into development as we get more visibility.

games™: Is there a risk of there being too many platforms, either for developers or the market generally to support?

BF: It could be, but I would caution people to look at history. You know, SEGA at one time had the Genesis – it was called the Mega Drive here? – the 32X, Sega CD followed shortly by the Saturn. And those systems shake out. So, to prognosticate, we can see a market where there's at least two high-end systems and two hand-held systems. Will there be 6 or 7 consoles, both hand-held and console-based? Probably not. And any rational publisher will follow where the markets are.

games™: Shouldn't you try to lead the market?

BF: No. The first-parties have to establish the platform. Sony, Microsoft and Nintendo... it's their job to drive the platform... if Microsoft did not have *Halo* the Xbox wouldn't be where it is today. And it's an interesting thing, looking at the industry right now... Sony has done it without a big first-party drive but Sony has gotten it right and Microsoft is getting better in that regard. So we need first parties driving the platform. We're not going to become leaders if we're not following where the dollars are.

games™: Doesn't that cast publishers in a purely reactive role?

BF: Not at all. I'll go back to the analogy of the arms supplier... we want two equally balanced sides fighting it out and to be supplying arms to each. If that's a following position then I'm happy to be a follower; we're in business to maximise the return to each shareholder. Yes, we want to make great entertainment product and we're not going to get the returns without great entertainment value but it's not our role to drive the market.

games™: What's the appeal of a licensed property?

BF: Well a licensed property – if done properly – should give you a built-in audience. I've been in this industry for a long time and I've seen a lot of bad licensed games and I think the industry has changed. I think if you take a step back now there's a lot of really, really good licensed property being made. For example, if you look at the strides we made with *Finding Nemo*, we executed the game with a very high level of quality by working very closely with Pixar and Disney.

We've got to give EA credit for doing what they do, you know with *Lord of the Rings* and some of their licensed properties I think you see the industry going away from just slapping a license on an average title because gamers know. We know that gamers know. Some of it has been publishers like us educating Hollywood and saying we need time.

There was a very high-profile license and we put an eight-figure offer on the table for that license saying we needed to know by April 30th whether or not we had the deal. And the studio thought we were just negotiating and when they came back in June or July and said, you know, you had the best offer, let's



sit down and cut a deal. We said you didn't hear us... we can't do a quality product in that time. They thought we were negotiating and we said no, we're not interested any more. No. And another publisher picked up the title, paid that eight-figure guarantee, brought out a below-average title, missed the movie and I'm sure took a financial bath. So you know we are educating the studios.

games™: How do you evaluate a license?

BF: We look for a license that has a long life, that's not just a one-off. Our relationship with Disney and Pixar is a strategic partnership; it's a three-picture deal that gives us rights to develop sequels and extensions till 2009. That's for our shareholders... they want that predictability and that cash flow. With WWE we have a 15-year term so we can invest heavily in marketing, build that brand and be able to develop it over time. We like to see something that's fairly stable and something that we can build over a long period of time.

games™: Is the profile or success of the license important?

BF: We've got a great example of that. We took a property on from Marvel Entertainment called *The Punisher*. And when we originally picked up the property there was no film on the horizon, we picked it up because we saw *The Punisher* as a great world to develop a game in. Vigilante characters are a perfect environment for video games; the character was there, what his world was like was already established. So we look at that license as more of a world and a framework that we could build out, rather than having a built-in audience.

Interestingly, in the meantime, in the two years we've been in development, Marvel green-lit, built and is now releasing a movie. We've tried to take some of the elements of the movie and get them into the game but there'll be a long period of time between the movie and the release of the game. We have a schedule that we're going to keep to for our product and our vision for that. I think you'll see more of that; I see some examples of that in the industry where there's a very rich game world and a license that might not be broadly known to the mass market but which has a built-in audience that you can build out from.

games™: There have been suggestions that original intellectual properties are more profitable than licensed properties. Has that been your experience?

BF: It depends. Our most profitable franchise internally at THQ is *Red Faction*. Between *Red Faction* and *Red Faction 2*, since we own the development and we own the IP, when you get a multi-million seller like that you get it all. Now, that being said, like all publishers the hit-to-release ratio of our own intellectual property is relatively low. It's low for everyone.

games™: Lower than for licenses?

BF: Oh, absolutely. There's no certainty that the property is going to resonate with the consumer. So if you look at owned IP, globally or in the aggregate,

I'm not sure the returns are any better or any worse. If you get it right, they're better. If you get it wrong they're significantly worse. So to say it's better is to mis-characterise owned IP.

games™: How do 'mature' games fit into the market and, more specifically, your publishing portfolio?

BF: Well if you look at all the research, gamers in the aggregate are getting older. There is a massive amount of gamers that are in their 20s and 30s who are demanding more mature themes in their games. So there's certainly a market there. As a parent and as a leader in the industry I think we've done a great job in terms of labelling the content, informing the consumer what it is. We've done a great job in America – I don't know what the market's like here – but we can't market to the inappropriate age demographic so I think as an industry we're taking responsible steps to protect children while at the same time providing entertainment that's being demanded by gamers everywhere.

One of our strategic initiatives is... we're not changing our focus, we'll continue to support the family category, we'll continue to serve teens, but when you look at our content coming up like *The Punisher*, like *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.*, even the *Dawn of War* property, we want to have a significant presence with the more mature, older gamer and I think the products we're bringing out will resonate very well with those.

games™: So what constitutes a 'mature' game?

BF: Well it's really not my view that counts. In this we'll take the industry's lead. A certain level of violence, a certain level of nudity or sexual themes or references to drugs or alcohol... in our industry it tends to be violence, we haven't had any significant real sexual themes in gaming. I'm not sure the game mechanic is there, to be honest. But it tends to be the violent themes, the gangland themes, which are prevalent.

games™: Is there a double standard at work between sex and violence in games?

BF: Well, let's put the regulators to the side for a moment and talk about the consumer. Consumers voted very loudly with their dollars about a game like *BMX XXX*. I'm actually glad *BMX XXX* failed, not because there was nudity in it but because it was a bad product. If there were a product that had nudity in it that resonated with the consumers in terms of the game play as being really innovative I would have... I'm not a moralist whatsoever.

With games like *GTA* I think the industry needs to be careful because of the interactive nature of our content. With things like violence against women, violence against children or law enforcement, it's a very fine line between artistic freedom and letting a game be what it ought to be.

I think there is something to be said about the entertainment industry and desensitisation towards violence and certainly the game industry is not immune to that. Neither is the music industry or television or films. I'm not trying to hide behind the



Fancy a spot of monster hunting? Or perhaps being a monster is more to your taste? THQ has what you need.



"GAME DEVELOPERS AND PUBLISHERS HAVE A RIGHT TO MAKE ANY CONTENT. BUT IT SHOULD BE RATED AND CLEARLY DISCLOSED."

BRIAN FARRELL
CHAIRMAN, PRESIDENT AND
CEO, THQ INC.

TEAM PROFILES

MARTIN GOOD

- **POSITION:** Vice-president, Asia Pacific Publishing
- **RESPONSIBILITIES:** Overseeing the Asia Pacific and Latin American publishing operations for THQ
- **FAVOURITE THQ GAME:** *Red Faction*
- **FAVOURITE NON-THQ GAME:** *Descent*
- **QUOTE:** "Knock on opportunity's door. Don't wait for it to knock on yours."



MIKE KOLODZINSKI

- **POSITION:** Marketing Director, Asia Pacific
- **RESPONSIBILITIES:** Heading up the marketing division for THQ Asia Pacific
- **FAVOURITE THQ GAME:** *WWE Smackdown: Here Comes the Pain*
- **FAVOURITE NON-THQ GAME:** *Jonah Lomu Rugby*
- **QUOTE:** "Leave nothing for tomorrow which can be done today." (Abraham Lincoln)



ESTELLE CLEAVER-WILKINSON

- **POSITION:** PR & Promotions Manager, Asia Pacific
- **RESPONSIBILITIES:** Positively promoting THQ and its products
- **FAVOURITE THQ GAME:** *Britney's Dance Beat*
- **FAVOURITE NON-THQ GAME:** *CSI*
- **QUOTE:** "The only thing to do with good advice is pass it on. It is never any use to oneself." (Oscar Wilde)



ELIZABETH KOTEVSKA

- **POSITION:** Product Manager, Asia Pacific
- **RESPONSIBILITIES:** Marketing THQ products for the Asia Pacific region
- **FAVOURITE THQ GAME:** *SpongeBob Squarepants: Battle for Bikini Bottom*
- **FAVOURITE NON-THQ GAME:** *GTA: Vice City*
- **QUOTE:** "Live the life you've imagined." (Henry David Thoreau)



DAN ARMSTRONG

- **POSITION:** Product Manager, Asia Pacific
- **RESPONSIBILITIES:** Marketing THQ products for the Asia Pacific region
- **FAVOURITE THQ GAME:** *WWE Smackdown: Here Comes the Pain*
- **FAVOURITE NON-THQ GAME:** *Driver*
- **QUOTE:** "Watch me pull a rabbit out of my hat!" (Bullwinkle)



You'll be excused if you think these games look familiar. THQ is always delighted to bring Capcom's titles to market. And why wouldn't it be?



"THE SIMS... DOES RESONATE WITH GIRLS BUT TO FIND A MARKET RATHER THAN JUST A PRODUCT IS THE KEY."

BRIAN FARRELL
CHAIRMAN, PRESIDENT AND
CEO, THQ INC.

others but it's certainly not just the games industry and I think certain things will always push buttons. There are song lyrics in music, violent themes on TV in the family hour... it's more endemic to society. As long as the industry communicates very clearly what the content is ... mature themes, strong violence, gore... whatever those descriptions, as long as it's on the label and communicated effectively, people have a right to make that content choice.

games™: Should retailers and regulatory bodies play a more active role in this?

BF: Absolutely. We've been very clear on this for a long period of time. Developers and publishers have a right to make any content. But it should be rated and clearly disclosed. The missing link has been retail enforcement. We're not hiding behind our ratings but we need retail enforcement. We spend, in the US, several million dollars a year on PR about ratings. We tell parents we want you to check the ratings.

games™: What about female gamers? How can we get more women to play games? Is the notion of a women's game patronising or sexist?

BF: The answer is we don't know. There have been some experiments. There was a startup in LA that did a lot of research trying to find what elements and play mechanics would appeal to female gamers. They had two products and they didn't resonate with girls. It's an age-old problem. We look at the female market... the research shows us there are a lot of women around 20-21 who tend to be very casual, playing online games for free. Girls tend to like some of our products like *Finding Nemo* or some of our Nickelodeon products. What we can't track is girls in their teenage years... we can't find that game that resonates with girls. The only potential example is *The Sims*. My teenage daughters both play *The Sims* and almost nothing else. So that style of game does resonate with girls but to find a market rather than just a product is the key.

games™: Is a licence the key? Barbie and Saddle Club games sell very well.

BF: *Barbie* - as a toy license - doesn't do as well as it should do. With a property like that if you can't sell millions of units, where is the girls' market? It's more of a counter-point to the point.

games™: There's a lot of anecdotal evidence that people aren't finishing games. If that's true, is that a problem? Are games too hard or too long?

BF: There seems to be a trend for games to become shorter, with higher production values. To address your point... people aren't finishing long games so let's give them a really intense entertainment experience for 12-15 hours rather than trying to stretch something out and work at keeping people busy for 30-40 hours. I think some of the best selling products now are 12- or 15-hour experiences.

Then there are games like *The Sims* - how many hours is that? It's thousands for some people. I would like everybody to play their games to see it all. It's poor design if people aren't enjoying it or if it's too hard.

games™: Is there a danger of a divide between casual and hardcore gamers? Can games reach both markets? Or will there be games for each?

BF: I think there are games that already do it. Look at our WWE franchise. Core gamers really love the gameplay but there's a lot of WWE fans who just want to get on and play with their friends and enjoy the product. I don't think there's a need to bridge the two. Some products will bridge the two but some products are just targeted to a specific audience that won't really speak to the other. That creates an opportunity in the industry.

We're taking a concerted effort to get into the hard-core PC market. I think trying to be all things to all people... we've got *Full Spectrum Warrior*, *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.*, *Dawn of War*... now we don't think of these as just hard-core games. We think these can rise above it like other titles that have done well on PC. We're not thinking we're just going to satisfy the hard-core gamer, it'd be a mistake to think that to sell 100 000 and walk out the door would be a success.

We think games like *Full Spectrum Warrior*... the number of people that come up to me when they hear I work for THQ and I mention the title... they say 'oh wow, I can't wait to play that'. It's got a real hardcore appeal to it but there's a lot of people who just want to get in and play because they've heard about it.

A lot of the industry does focus testing but we do a lot of usability testing. Is the game too hard? How are the controls and the interface? Do you really understand what you're trying to do and do you feel comfortable doing it? Certainly with a game in a new genre—like *Full Spectrum Warrior*—that's key.

games™: A simple question: is online gaming the way of the future?

BF: No. THQ is the company that brought out the Xband gaming modem, one of the first online gaming devices. And what we've learned we learned back in 1994, 10 years ago, is that it's still a game feature. Some people want to play online games and we will serve that market.

The online version of *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.*, the online components of *Full Spectrum Warrior*, the online components of *Dawn of War* will be as robust as any online products out there. But there are some games that should be single-player, so it's not either/or... online is a portion of the business but it's not the future.

games™: So does that mean Nintendo made the right decision to stay out?

BF: No. You need to be in both. Online can be a very powerful component to drive sales, to generate word of mouth, to extend shelf life... with *Full Spectrum Warrior* we're expecting great Xbox Live support.

So online can be very powerful but to say it can supplant single-player gaming... no. It's not an either/or question... the answer is both.

games™: What are THQ's online plans? How do Xbox Live and Network Gaming compare?

BF: Xbox Live's strength is that Microsoft has spent—in their own words—a billion dollars, two billion dollars building a network. We don't get hung up, like some of our competitors, on who owns the customer. We want to get paid for our content. To the extent that they're building it, it's like another console. It's another platform for us to sell our content and as long as we get rewarded for bringing our content to any platform, we want to serve our customers. I actually think very highly of it, I think it's well-executed, I think there's a bright future for Microsoft there.

Sony online feels to us more like an open environment, like the PC environment, where it's up to the publishers to support the community. Like the PC market it seems very hard to charge additional monies—like some of the vision for Xbox Live. The best vision for the online market is a global mall. People do want to play online games and we intend to continue in a leadership position but it won't supplant the single player experience. It's not the future of gaming. The real disadvantage in America is market penetration; in Australia it's the cost of broadband.

games™: How different from handheld gaming is mobile gaming, and do you have plans to jump in?

BF: Well first I'd ask why is it different from online gaming? The answer is there's a business model. People are used to paying for additional services or content on their mobile phone. Like handheld gaming, to answer your question more specifically, it's a more casual experience. You don't need 40 hours of gameplay... in fact, 40 minutes might be adequate. It's a very casual environment. We're very optimistic about the future; the platforms themselves, the handsets, are becoming very game-friendly in terms of the screens and the interfaces that are available. And there is a business model as I said so we intend to be a leader.

games™: The games industry is now bigger than the movie industry, but games don't seem to have the same cultural pull. Should the industry seek that?

BF: Well, I'd want to push back a little and look at products like *Grand Theft Auto*. It is a cultural phenomenon. Maybe more so than any recent film. I'm not sure I subscribe to the thesis. I think gaming has changed the face of entertainment. Hollywood is enraptured with what's going on and they're looking more at how this industry works. I think we should be proud about where we are, not defensive. Our industry's growing up—that's why it's exciting.

games™: One last question: what's the best game you ever played?

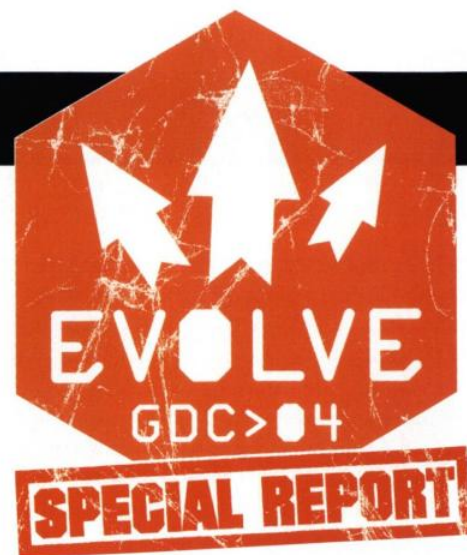
BF: Best game I ever played... you know the one that I always keep going back to is *Donkey Kong Country*. That's the one that everyone in the family played. It sounds almost trite, what is it now, 8 or 10 years later, but it was a great product and everyone in the family played it. It speaks to games, you know... easy to get into, difficult to master. One of those games that just kept you playing for hours and hours.

"...THERE ARE SOME GAMES THAT SHOULD BE SINGLE-PLAYER, SO IT'S NOT EITHER/OR... ONLINE IS A PORTION OF THE BUSINESS BUT IT'S NOT THE FUTURE."

BRIAN FARRELL
CHAIRMAN, PRESIDENT AND
CEO, THQ INC.



Coming soon to a PS2 or Xbox near you... Cryptosproidium-137 and his plan to *Destroy All Humans*, from Pandemic Studios. Earthlings, you have been warned.



AS PRESIDENT OF SEGA OF AMERICA, PETER MOORE PLAYED A PIVOTAL ROLE IN CHANGING THE COMPANY'S BUSINESS STRATEGY FROM A HARDWARE MANUFACTURER TO A MULTI-PLATFORM SOFTWARE COMPANY. NOW HE'S IN CHARGE OF MARKETING AND PUBLISHING AT MICROSOFT GAMES. AND HE'S VERY EXCITED ABOUT THE FUTURE OF XBOX GAMING. OUR EUROPEAN CORRESPONDENT REPORTS...

CORPORATE VICE PRESIDENT

PETER MOORE

Four years ago, Bill Gates unveiled the first Xbox at the Game Developers' Conference in San José, so with talk of the next next generation of consoles rife, we were happy to be invited by Microsoft to the GDC for this year's big announcement. After rousing speeches from chief Xbox officer Robbie Bach and corporate vice president J Allard, Microsoft unveiled XNA – its cross-platform, next-generation architecture. The news hardly seemed Earth-shattering, until you saw the demos and realised that this is, in fact, Xbox 2 in action.

Speaking after the announcement of XNA, Peter Moore, corporate vice president of retail, sales and marketing for Microsoft's home entertainment division, is keen to evangelise about the company's next-generation strategy, which he believes will make game development a much less painful process. "XNA is a cross-platform, industry-wide software development platform, bringing both the worlds of Windows and Xbox together and focusing on making our developers lives an awful lot easier, allowing them to make better games faster," he says. "We see one of the issues going into the next generation as the cost of development. That's something that Microsoft, probably unlike any other company in the world, can bring dev support to these folks and help them get through what potentially could be a very expensive undertaking, as we look at the expectations of the consumers and what they expect from the next generation of hardware. We're going to change it from being a hardware problem to a software solution."

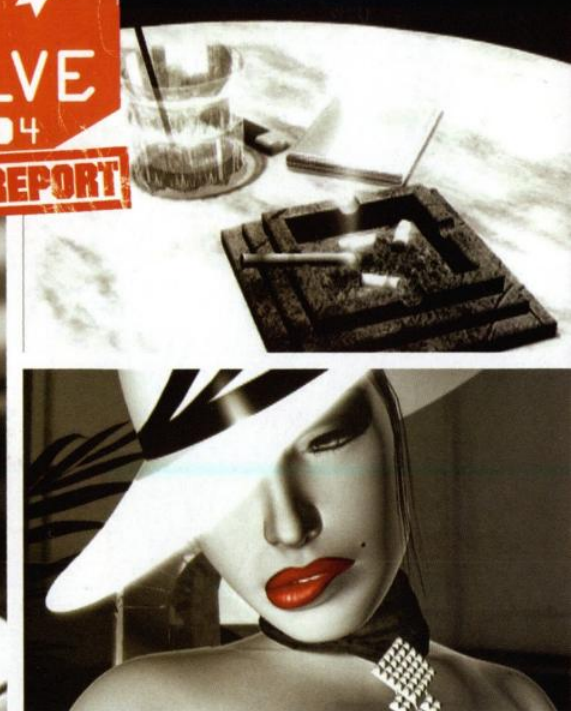
Microsoft claims that only 20 per cent of developer time is used in the creative process, with the other 80 per cent swallowed up writing routines and software to create the backbone of the game. As games become more elaborate, the costs and time involved in developing new titles skyrockets. Cutting down on the time developers spend writing code to get their games up and running is the main aim for XNA. Demonstrating the power of the new development

suite, Moore invites us to play three tech demos that took two months each to create: *Crash*, *Film Noir* and *Xenomorph*. Running on a Windows XP system with a next-generation ATI card, these demos are close to what we can expect from Xbox 2, as Moore admits the demos are "the opening salvo in the next generation, but it's not about the hardware, it's about the software. [Developers] don't have to wait for the silicon, they can already begin to work on the core underpinnings of a game without having to wait for the hardware to come to them in the form of an XDK [Xbox Development Kit] because we're now providing, through XNA, the tools necessary to start building what the game is all about. I think that's going to be the differentiator."

Microsoft is under no illusions that PlayStation2 has won the current console war, but Moore is in fighting spirit. "We will win the battle with Sony next time around because we intend to make it a software battle," he says. "There's no company that has used its ability to embrace its developers, to allow them to build games, better than Microsoft. It's not going to be about hardware – clearly that plays very well into Sony's strengths as a consumer electronics company – it really will be about software. And the benefits that we're going to be able to provide for developers will then be seen in the types of games that consumers are going to be able to play in this generation of Xbox." So Microsoft plans to make producing games for Xbox 2 such a creatively liberating experience that it will be able to tempt the industry's key developers away from Sony? Moore seems to think so. "In the last 12 months more and more developers have made Xbox the lead platform and have then ported down to PS2 if they believe they need to make their game multiplatform. A number of developers – and some big games that you'll see a lot of at E3 – are specific to our platforms because they get the performance out of the Xbox environment and they can't actually get it into a PS2 environment because a) it's a difficult development environment and b) it's not powerful enough to be able to render the type of resolution we're seeing in these games."

**"WE'RE GOING TO KNOCK DOWN
THE BARRIERS BETWEEN THE PC
AND XBOX WITH XBOX LIVE AND
OPEN UP AN INCREDIBLY LARGE
WORLD WITH THE ABILITY TO
BRING GAMERS TOGETHER
REGARDLESS OF WHAT
PLATFORM THEY'RE PLAYING ON"**





■ *Film Noir* (one of the three XNA demos) wasn't particularly interactive but showed off some highly impressive graphical effects.



■ XNA stands for Cross-platform, Next-generation Architecture, in case you were wondering.



"ONE OF THESE DAYS EA WILL PROBABLY SEE THE LIGHT"

PETER MOORE, CORPORATE VICE PRESIDENT, MICROSOFT GAMES

▷ Of course, Sony did a great job weaning its PlayStation2 owners onto PlayStation2 with backward compatibility, and will undoubtedly be trying to do the same with the PS3, does this cause Moore any sleepless nights? "[The] installed base of PS2 is an issue for us, but the great thing about this industry is that there's a time when the next generation comes and all bets are off," he says. "Right now we have a very large installed base, we have the best online gaming network, there are no naysayers any more that doubt our credibility. We're going to have tens of millions of great Xbox consumers following us into the next generation. We clearly have established a very strong number-two position both here in the US as well as in Europe. I think when you bring all that to bear it's a whole different ballgame going into the next generation..." Moore pauses, "Which, by the way, began this morning."

There's no doubting Xbox Live's innovation, but ☐ Microsoft has been having problems bringing giants like Electronic Arts on board; can Xbox online gaming survive without them? With EA's vast catalogue of lucrative licensed titles, it would be valuable to have the publisher under Xbox Live's wing. And Moore thinks that EA may eventually come round. "Clearly, EA is a great partner of ours, they're [the] number one third-party publisher on Xbox and Windows. Our biggest challenge right now is in Europe; we wish broadband would hurry up and become a lot more ubiquitous, we wish we were able to resolve some of the issues about credit cards. Those are the bigger issues right now, not the lack of games. We have 70 great games and growing on the platform – more than every gamer would want. We are constantly in communication with EA about the business differences we have but right now we're very happy with where we are with Xbox Live. One of these days they'll probably see the light!"

Xbox Live is certainly revolutionary, but what ☐ new developments can we expect to see on the service over the next 12 months? "We're over 100,000 users for Live in

Europe, but we'd like to be a little bit more," Moore explains. "I think that *Halo 2* is going to be a huge boost to that number, certainly *Project Gotham Racing 2* was. The massively multiplayer online RPG is a world that I think we need to bring together, and XNA is truly cross-platform so if there is one type of game genre where a Windows PC user and an Xbox user can come together and compete and collaborate it's in the online RPG. I think we're going to see more and more the blending of our platforms. We're going to provide toolkits for our Windows and Xbox developers for Xbox Live and then it's up to them, this is the classic Microsoft way – 'here it is guys, here's all the tools, we're providing the platform, you provide the applications and the creativity to bring it together'. We're going to knock down the barriers between the PC and Xbox with Xbox Live and open up an incredibly large world with the ability to bring gamers together regardless of what platform they're playing on."

While a killer app in the shape of an MMORPG would be great on Live, the European gamer is really hoping for a playable online football game. Is Microsoft any closer to delivering this? "We've started to make some progress with Xbox Live soccer, a Codemasters game as well as *Winning Eleven* from Konami being announced for the platform. So we're delighted to be able to start building our content for the Live service, but we can still see some holes." Well, that's good news, but a big concern for Xbox gamers is that Live will allow publishers to push their games out unfinished, using downloads to patch the game later on. This has already begun with *Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow*, so how does Moore see the system



■ This was the eighteenth Game Developers' Conference, and the last to be held in San José. Next time, the industry's finest will be off to San Francisco.



■ The *Crash* program demonstrated some impeccable car physics and there's a chance it could be developed into a full game for the launch of Xbox 2.

progressing? "Our plan is to enhance the game experience by providing downloads, missions, quests, extra levels in the future – really starting to blow out the expanse of the game over a period of time. I'm always loath to use the phrase 'episodic content' because it makes developers shiver, but ultimately I think it's something we will see in our industry. In Japan, *Phantasy Star Online* does astonishingly well because Sonic Team constantly makes missions and quests available on a monthly basis, which keeps the game fresh and gamers are willing to pay extra. This is our vision of what Xbox Live will be."

XNA (CROSS-PLATFORM NEXT-GENERATION ARCHITECTURE)

Microsoft believes that the next-generation war will be fought with software rather than hardware and XNA is its powerful development platform for Windows, mobile and Xbox 2 games. It brings together technologies and tools from Microsoft and its partners to provide developers with a quicker way to the creative side of game design. The technology system makes the groundwork of any game easier, so that more time and resources can be put into pushing genres further, creating new and more exciting environments, and moving the games industry on to the next generation. Current games are created with development tools such as Direct X, High-Level Shader Language, XACT, PIX and Xaudio. XNA gives a developer a suite of tools that includes all of these, but it's also an ever-growing project where experiences and technology developed by other studios will be pulled together to aid future game production. The result should be the most amazing games ever created – and an exciting launch line-up for Xbox 2.

Crash

Developed by: Pseudo Interactive

With the nuts-and-bolts work for this demo made easier with XNA, Pseudo Interactive's David Wu was able to use his expertise in car physics to create a highly realistic crash model. The demo allows the speed to be tampered with, along with the incline of the ramp and angle of the barrier. The car splinters into thousands of pieces on impact, and once the bodywork has crumpled, accurate double-wishbone suspension can be seen. This demo is rumoured to become a launch game for Xbox 2.

Film Noir

Developed by: Xbox Advanced Technology Group

The Xbox Advanced Technology Group is led by Laura Fryer, one of the founders of the Microsoft 'Women in Gaming' sessions at GDC. Strange then, that she would choose to create a sexy film noir demo starring a sultry temptress. Control of the demo is limited, but the user can pan in and out, circle around and order a drink from a robo-waitress. XNA allowed the development team to work more on the ambience and detailed environments, rather than the basic coding that would normally be needed.

Xenomorph

Developed by: High Voltage

While the current crop of games involve the creation of visuals first and audio second, XNA has allowed High Voltage to marry the two together in a way previously only known in big-budget animated movies. The sound engineer worked side-by-side with the animators to create a demo where creatures morph from one to another seamlessly, and the sound they make as they romp along is tied in with the action.



"THE VIDEO GAME INDUSTRY MUST BAND TOGETHER TO FIND A SOLUTION THAT ENSURES VITALITY... FOR YEARS TO COME"

ROBERT J. BACH,
SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT,
GAMES DIVISION,
MICROSOFT CORP.

SPEAK YOUR BRAINS

This year's GDC once again saw some of the industry's most distinguished figures taking to the stage to share a few pearls of wisdom with us mere mortals...

WARREN SPECTOR

- Famed for designing such multi-branching masterpieces as *Deus Ex: Invisible War*, Warren Spector's address covered the nature of game narrative and the experience-management problems presented by penning a 'freeform' storyline.



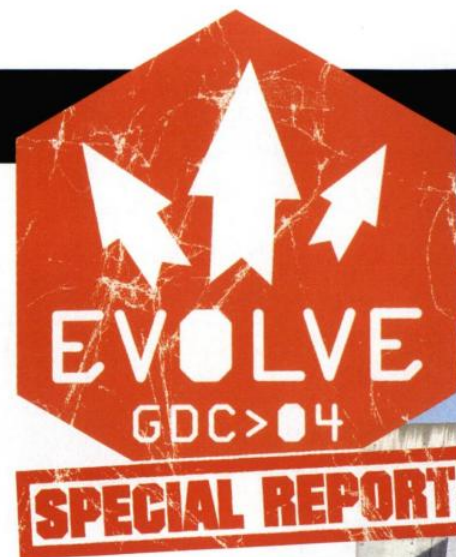
PETER MOLYNEUX

- Molyneux had examples from hotly anticipated projects *Black & White 2* and *Fable* on hand to demonstrate the various types of advanced AI developers are now creating, including the complex systems bringing the *Fable* universe to life.



JOHN CARMACK

- id's master programmer Carmack covered a range of subjects and offered a thoughtful insight into the future of the industry, highlighting how technological complexity is making the development process more of a chore than a creative art.



GAME DEVELOPERS CONFERENCE

SO WHAT ELSE WENT ON AT THE GDC WHEN MICROSOFT WASN'T BUSY STEALING THE SHOW?

It could have been the best of times, it could have been the worst of times, but the feeling for many visiting this year's Game

Developers' Conference was that the show was neither. Certainly, announcements of what was to come raised expectations for not just this year's E3 but for future shows, and Microsoft's admittedly interesting – but also forehead-smackingly obvious, given its take on convergence technology – XNA announcement definitely stole the show. However, the overall mood was somewhat subdued compared to previous years, perhaps indicating that the industry is finally focusing on the here and now, rather than simply crowing about its future plans. The XNA bombshell notwithstanding, there were plenty of other announcements to keep the average newshound happy for a weekend.

The majority of the unveilings focused purely on games and, more specifically, on the current generation of hardware – which is good news, obviously – but we were left sorely wanting when it came to fresh titles. With Epic's

demonstration of the new Unreal 3.0 engine and the continuation of the *Serious Sam* and *Oddworld* franchises being pretty much as good as it got as far as brand new revelations went, the remaining games were simply improved versions of titles we already knew were coming: *Black & White 2* and *Fable* from Lionhead; *Tribes: Vengeance*, *Red Ninja* and *Leisure Suit Larry* from Vivendi; *Jade Empire* from the stars at BioWare; and more besides. Not that we're complaining, of course – after all, new chances to play on anticipated titles are always a plus – but those hoping for GDC to act as a taster for the upcoming E3 were left disappointed.

Interestingly, it was Sony that came away from the show with a much-deserved second place (something that the Japanese giant must see as a rare occurrence), despite its relatively low-key presence at the event. Sony's booth offered plenty of experiences for the wandering visitor, such as hard-drive-using appearances of *Final Fantasy XI* and *Resident Evil: Outbreak*; the 'unlikely to make it out of Japan at this rate' genius that is *Mojib Ribbon*; karaoke goodness in

"TODAY WE'RE RENDERING A MILLION POLYGONS A SECOND IN MANY CASES AND WE'RE STILL A LONG WAY FROM WHAT YOU WOULD CALL PHOTOREALISTIC"

JOHN CARMACK, ID SOFTWARE



■ Sony's presence was relatively low-key, but news of the PSP and the number of developers who are on board was impressive.

the form of *SingStar*, and also *EyeToy: Groove*, which proved so popular that some attendees had to stand in line just to make fools of themselves in front of everyone.

Yet just as everyone thought Sony's modest showing might have been simple damage limitation against Microsoft's domination, the company's big presentation introduced the world to *Death Jr* – the very first officially confirmed PSP title, currently in joint development between Digital Eclipse and Backbone Entertainment. While the usual mix of a free-roaming 3D world, a cute central character with a flair all of his own, and numerous enemies to pummel isn't anything new, the fact that a game that is graphically equal to an early PS2 offering is running on Sony's handheld hardware raises our spirits. What's more, the game is being touted as a PSP exclusive that'll be ready for the machine's US launch in spring 2005. Needless to say, the anticipation is already making our mouths water...

It was the PSP that proved to be Sony's trump card at the show, with several members of the development community on hand to show their approval. Official Sony sources confirm that the platform currently has 81 developers working on titles for it – with 34 in Europe, 23 in the US and 24 in Japan – which backs up suggestions that the handheld is becoming something of a darling within the games industry.

Whether Sony will be able to back this up with a quality launch line-up remains to be seen – *Death Jr* aside, no other games have been confirmed for the console, and claims that PS2 titles can be ported onto a PSP in as little as four weeks (a genuine comment from Digital Eclipse's Chris Charla) fills us with a fear that there will be a massive deluge of lacklustre ports from the PS2's back catalogue. Still, Sony has the best part of a year to ensure victory and, of course, there will almost certainly be even more revelations at this year's E3...



GDC AWARDS



While most of the conference was spent looking to the future of gaming, the fourth annual Game Developers' Choice Awards was an opportunity for developers to celebrate the achievements of their peers over the past year. These are a few of the big winners...

- BioWare scooped four awards, including Game of the Year and the Excellence in Writing award for *Star Wars: KOTOR*. Droid HK-47 was voted Original Game Character of the Year. Bioware's Greg Zeschuk and Ray Muzyka won the Community Contribution award.



- The Lifetime Achievement award went to Mark Cerny for his involvement in the *Sonic The Hedgehog*, *Crash Bandicoot* and *Ratchet & Clank* franchises, while rhythm action pioneer Masaya Matsura won the First Penguin award for innovation.



- *Call Of Duty* developer Infinity Ward scooped the Rookie Studio and Excellence in Audio awards, while Ubisoft collected the Excellence in Programming and Excellence in Game Design gongs for *The Sands Of Time*. *The Wind Waker* won the Excellence in Visual Arts prize.





LETTER FROM AMERICA

WITH YOUR FRIENDLY CORRESPONDENT, THE SHAPE

"ONLINE GAMING PUT SOMETHING BACK IN MY LIFE THAT WAS DEARLY FROM WONDROUS TECHNOLOGY AND AGGRESSIVE CORPORATE GREED IS

A while back in these pages, I made passing mention of gratitude towards Microsoft – not the sort of thing to be done lightly. This was for creating and providing the Xbox Live service, a modern gaming benefit that is no doubt great fun wherever you are, but which holds a dear place in my heart for facilitating superb long-distance play with my old friends back in Britain. Since then, things have got a bit out of hand.

These were people with whom I played in person on a daily basis; everything from *Twisted Metal 2* to *Halo*, *SEGA Bass Fishing* to *Perfect Dark*. Then, abruptly after initiating Operation Escape From Britain Because It Sucks, all that was gone. The banter, camaraderie, friendly competition... believe me, it leaves a gap. The sensation is not quite homesickness, but it comes from the same place. All the long-distance phone calls, emails and instant messaging sessions in the world can't fill the void of gaming loneliness. It's not like Americans won't sit down and play a game with you, but it's an experience so dissimilar that the appetite remains unsatisfied. For a start, all commentary must concern the posterior: they're kicking our asses; you just got your ass handed to you; kiss my ass and so on. There's a lot of hooting and hollering and woo yeah, how d'ya like that. And, uncomfortably, it is not outside the realm of possibility that you will be offered another man's palm to slap in response to victory. Think of your group of gaming friends now. Can you imagine

the reaction if you were to throw in a celebratory high five? The hospital would need dental records to identify you.

What I needed was real gaming, with my real British mates, all of whom are tremendously accomplished at real swearing. I got it, in a big way, when I hooked up to Xbox Live. What I thought would be an occasional distraction hit my daily life like a train. No sooner has the notion of checking my UK-centric friends list to see who's online crossed my mind than the day and night are lost. Generally, someone is around. By the time they depart, a few more have shown up. On it goes until I can no longer see clearly.

The whole experience seems to have caught all of us in a trap of voluntary addiction, all the way over the Atlantic. One in our midst, a journalist who shall remain nameless, largely for the purposes of blackmail, is known for playing horizontally from bed whilst consuming inadvisable quantities of red wine, staving off the effects of an obnoxious heating system. "One more go," he'll slur at 3am, as four of us lie cold and bleeding on the concrete floor of *Rainbow Six 3's* punishing Meat Packing Plant. "We've got to do it."

In many cases, morning has broken for my UK pals before we all agree it might be time to turn off. Snatching only three hours sleep because you wished to assure a team victory on *Cat & Mouse* at the Nürburgring? That's friendship. I hear about them crashing into work the next day, glazing through meetings,



Live – life-devouring yet strangely life-affirming.





MISSED. A CONCOCTION BREWED JUST THE TONIC TO CURE MY BLUES™

amputating the wrong limbs, bombing the wrong islands; while on my side the time difference makes for a usual night's sleep. But, you know, I feel for them.

This is not me trying to tell you online gaming is great, like you don't already have an opinion on the matter. It's me telling you that this amazing tool put something back in my life that was dearly missed. A concoction brewed from wondrous technology and aggressive corporate greed has proven just the tonic to cure my blues. My closest friend and I, now thousands of miles removed from one another, can kick back, chat the night away and shoot each other, just like the old days. Just as easily, a dozen of us can convene in a sort of Old Boys meet-up. This service bridges one hell of a gap and I am grateful.

In the bigger picture of online, I'm not claiming ignorance of the problems. The Live rush is systematically devouring the single-player convention, which it seems to me should remain the heart of a game. (1Up-lite games like *Counter-Strike* still don't come home with me.) Then there's the devilry of 'premium' downloads, or the staggering number of assholes waiting for you to stray off your friends list, or the occasional lag even on a 3.0Mb pipe... None of which means I want to spend another day without an active subscription.

Many thanks

THE
SHAPE

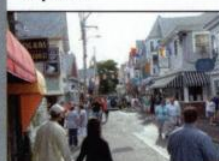
MISS ABOUT BRITAIN...

John Peel



LOVE ABOUT AMERICA...

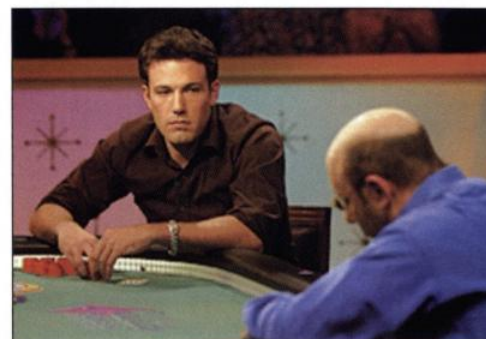
Cape Cod



AMERIKAAN

PRODUCTS, PLACES, SERVICES AND EVENTS FROM THE LAND OF THE FREE

CELEBRITY POKER



Ben Affleck, someone you thought was dead off *Thirtysomething* and various interchangeable cast members of *The West Wing* gather to play high-stakes poker for the charities of their choosing. Ben's view of the table obscured by his very talent, he loses.

US MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Harvest Moon: A Wonderful Life	Natsume	GC
2	MVP Baseball 2004	EA Sports	Multi
3	Ninja Gaiden	Tecmo	Xbox
4	Metal Gear Solid: Twin Snakes	Konami	GC
5	The Suffering	Midway	Multi
6	Drakengard	Square Enix	PS2
7	Call Of Duty	Activision	PC
8	Ghost Recon: Jungle Storm	Ubisoft	Multi
9	Breakdown	Namco	Xbox
10	Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles	Nintendo	GC

(Updated 21/3/04)



WANT ANY
QUESTIONS
ANSWERED BY THE
SHAPE? THEN DROP
HIM A LINE AT:
theshape@comcast.net
HE MIGHT LISTEN,
IF YOU'RE LUCKY



KONGETSU*

WITH JAPANESE CORRESPONDENT TIM ROGERS

"I NOW HAVE GAME BOY GAMES TO PLAY ON THE TRAIN – JUST LIKE A SO I'VE INVENTED THE 'YAMANOTE SCORING SYSTEM"

If you recall your games™ continuum correctly, just recently I combined a black Game Boy Advance with a white battery lid, and I was having angry issues about the price of game software in Japan. So I found a solution – beg for games. It wasn't hard. I have a lot of fans on the internet, and most of them are at least half as strange as me, so it amounted to my getting a lot of Game Boy Advance games sent to me from all over the world. I've been collecting them in this pink nylon drawstring bag that my thieving former roommate was using to keep the Game Boy Advance all alone because he had no games.

Anyway, just two weeks ago I finished writing the first volume of my new two-volume novel, so I decided to get out of the house for a week; this meant taking a poor man's inner-Tokyo vacation aboard the Yamanote Line. The Yamanote Line is a legendary piece of transportation – it goes in a circle mostly, meaning you can board it at Ikebukuro and if you ride for an hour you'll be back in Ikebukuro. Some people live to quote Yamanote trivia that they think only they know, like how it's not really a loop because at one point it becomes the Tohoku Line, only the name doesn't change. I say forget that – all you need to know is that the Yamanote Line is marked on maps with a bright green, that it has 29 stops (fact: prime numbers are one of the few things I like more than

games), and that I call the hobby of riding the Yamanote around and around in circles 'Shooting Hoops', which I stole from the final track of *Ridge Racer 4*. Even in the middle of the night, the train's lighting is harsh enough to play Game Boy games without squinting. Now, though, thanks to various generous readers, I have Game Boy games to play on the train, like your typical Japanese salaryman, and the experience inspires me to invent the 'Yamanote Scoring System for Portable Games'.

I make a note of the station the train had just left when I turn the game on, and then count backwards from the station the train is approaching when I take the game out. The game's final score is anywhere from 1 to 29+, the latter meaning that I managed to play the game for an entire loop without going crazy. My good friend Hideo Kojima and I were talking a couple of weeks back about how Japanese people who play videogames on the train are usually listening to their own MiniDisc music mixes on headphones. Kojima laments this, saying: "We put a lot of work into the music on *Boktai*." So a caveat of my scoring system is that I have to be listening to each game's music while playing the game on the train.

The only game, so far, to score a one (and this is based only on games sent to me by sadistic readers, mostly from Europe) is *Kirby's Block Ball*, which was just too damned bland. John Lappin, UK resident and loyal games™ reader, sent me *Advance*



■ Can't play on a real train? Pretend to drive one at home, instead...





JAPANESE SALARYMAN – FOR PORTABLE GAMES™

Wars 2, which was fortunate enough to score a 67 before the repetitive music got to me. *Mario & Luigi* gets a 58, because I ran into a wall about two hours in at this place where you have to navigate through a maze of barrels, where you can't see the road. *Final Fantasy Legend* scored a 9, taking me only from Ikebukuro to Okachimachi, because I realised after 18 minutes that my nostalgia was a pathological liar. The highest score so far is Nintendo's 1991 masterpiece *Metroid II: Return Of Samus*, with an 88. I blame the ambient pieces of music, spare enough for you to still hear the train announcements in the outside world.

I kind of like my new scoring system. How I'm going to manage to make money off it, I don't know yet. All I know is that I have to make money off it somehow, for justice's sake. I used to meet women Shooting Hoops, but now they all just look at me like another dumb foreign bastard playing games when he could be enjoying the scenery of the most-travelled line of transportation in the world.

Kind regards

Tim Rogers

TEACH YOURSELF JAPANESE

LESSON THIRTEEN: TRAIN TALK DEFENCE

Ne oniisan, nande ge-mu yatteruno?

Aa! Kore wa ore no shigoto dayo! Zasshi no koramu kaiterundayo

Aa sounanda? Donna zasshi?

Anou, fasshon no zasshi dayo! [Kore wa ENN-GEEJI dattara hazukashikunainaa]

Hey mister, why are you playing games?

Oh! This is my job! I write a column for a magazine

Oh really? What kind of magazine?

Uh, it's a fashion magazine!

[I wouldn't be so embarrassed if this were an N-Gage...]



■ It's ¥980 in this photo, though I swear I've seen it for ¥480.



■ Is the guy next to me reading... games™?! (He is, as it happens)

A TRAIN WITHIN A TRAIN

If you cannot afford a plane ticket Japan and/or like pain, you can always just buy a Bandai WonderSwan for ¥980 and a copy of the Yamanote Line *Densha de Go!* for ¥480.

The WonderSwan is a poor man's Game Boy, with a million little candy-shaped buttons that stab your fingers when pressed, and Squaresoft only put its *Final Fantasy IV* on there because it wanted to piss off Nintendo. Taito, however, put *Densha de Go!* on the WonderSwan for far more respectable reasons – it wants to piss you off.

It's worth noting that this game is a WonderSwan original – not WonderSwan Color, which brought colour to the many manga-based games on the system, or SwanCrystal, which helpfully made that colour not cause migraines.

One characteristic of all original WonderSwan games is that they have this lovely mud-filter laid over their black-and-white graphics, which proves to be especially endearing when you're desperately trying to play a rock-hard based-on-precision train simulator with a billion little instrument panels cluttering the handheld screen.

JAPANESE MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Monster Hunter	Capcom	PS2
2	Famicom Mini: Super Mario Bros.	Nintendo	GBA
3	Onimusha 3	Capcom	PS2
4	Ninja Gaiden	Tecmo	Xbox
5	One Piece: Baseball	Bandai	GBA
6	Metal Gear Solid: Twin Snakes	Konami	GC
7	Winning Eleven 7 International	Konami	PS2
8	Sengoku Musou	Koei	PS2
9	Pokémon Fire Red	Nintendo	GBA
10	Custom Robo	Nintendo	GC

(Updated 14/3/04 © 2004 Media Create Co. Ltd. All Rights Reserved)



HE'S BEEN IN THE GAMES INDUSTRY FOR OVER 20 YEARS, IS SYNONYMOUS WITH COMPUTERISED SNOOKER, AND HAS COLLECTED MORE ARCADE MACHINES THAN YOU'VE HAD HOT DINNERS. NOW 8-BIT HERO ARCHER MACLEAN IS BACK TO RACK UP ANOTHER FRAME OR TWO...



"I DON'T THINK I'VE EVER DONE THE STATUS THING – I'VE ALWAYS WANTED MY QUALITY TO SPEAK FOR ITSELF"

ARCHER MACLEAN, AWESOME STUDIOS

AWESOME STUDIOS

ARCHER MACLEAN

When young Archer Maclean gingerly placed a shiny 10 pence coin in a new arcade game called *Space Invaders*, little did he realise how much it would change his life. Maclean had been creating electronic gadgets from a young age, but all this changed with the arrival of *Space Invaders*, *Missile Command* and *Asteroids*. "I soon realised that you can come up with a piece of software and change it much more quickly than adapting a lump of electronics," explains Maclean, who was so smitten with arcade gaming that he's now amassed a collection of over 150 cabinets. "However, I also believed that I could write complete games as good as that on my own computers and, naturally, no-one believed it." Unperturbed, he began working on *Dropzone* for the Atari 800 in 1980 and had the last laugh when it became a huge hit for both the 800 and Commodore64 a few years later.

After becoming fixated with his Atari 800, Maclean entertained ambitions of working at Atari, but the firm's collapse caused him to rethink his plans. Despite this setback, he still has a deep fondness for the formative years of game development. "I miss the 'good ol days' because I was single-mindedly determined to achieve a good result and only had myself to blame if it wasn't up to scratch," Maclean reminisces. With this in mind, it's no surprise that he feels his best work has always been created when he was left to his own devices. "All the games in the past that I developed on my own and sold when finished were hugely more successful than the later ones where a publisher and their management structure bugged me around for the whole time they were 'financing' it," he confirms.

Although coding could be learned by just about anyone, there were no guarantees of a hit. "Very few people had the software skills or stamina to actually finish off all aspects of a complete machine-code game," Maclean explains. "We had virtually no software, graphics and sound 'tools' in those days – you had to write all that as well as the game. I guess the perfect analogy would be 'Everyone can draw to some extent, but it takes a lot more effort to produce a Rembrandt'."

Maclean's games are works of art, in a way, as he's always sought to make them as playable as possible. *IK+* and *Archer Maclean's Pool* were huge hits thanks to high anticipation among his fans. Even now, a new baize-based game from Maclean generates interest – though he's the first to admit that it can do more harm than good. "Right now, I seem to be labelled with being the bloke who created the snooker and pool genre, and sure enough they've gone on to sell a million copies, but look beneath the surface and there is a fair bit of diversity in there," he says. "Shortly, the world will see just how different my next titles are – and no, they have nothing to do with snooker. One's a sort of *Dropzone 2*, but it's a bit of a monumental Spielberg effort, and the other's top secret. A new *IK+++* is bubbling up too, so I'd wait for that, rather than buying some inferior version from someone claiming to own the heritage." Maclean is, of course, referring to his public spat with a certain developer over the rights to the classic *IK+*.

Now, Maclean now finds himself putting his development duties on hold in order to head Awesome Studios. Luckily, he's well aware of the pitfalls a developer can face; something he hopes Awesome Studios will avoid with its current publisher, Ignition Entertainment. "There are lots of reasons why there is so much crap out there today," he says, "with one being due to the publishers enslaving developers to a milestone schedule set in stone, then drip feeding them on sustenance pay. Publishers are typically run by accountants and managers who just don't understand the creative process and think that entire 18-month projects with 30 people can be planned to the nearest hour and brought in on time on a budget and still be brilliant."

Hopefully, Awesome Studios' first game, *Pool Paradise*, will keep the publishers happy – Maclean's been designing ball physics since 1980 so it should be good. But success is not something he worries about, and once *Pool Paradise* is out of the way you can be pretty sure he'll be happy to go back to playing on one of his arcade cabinets... 

Pool Paradise is out now on PlayStation2, Xbox, GameCube and PC.

THE INDUSTRY'S FINEST PREPARE TO DO BATTLE FOR THE MOST COVETED PRIZE IN GAMING – A GAMES™ AWARD

games™ awards 2004

It doesn't seem like a whole year since we got the games™ ball rolling, but here we all are. We figured it was time to have a little celebration – of the best games we've seen in the last 12 months. Naturally, managing to come up with a host of categories (not to mention nominees for each) has caused all manner of arguments among the games™ team, but we're now quietly confident that the cream of the crop has been scooped off, ready for the tasting.

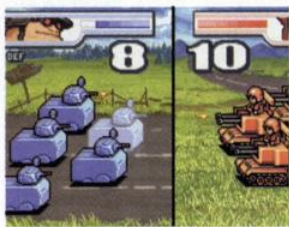
However, we're doing things a little differently this year. As readers, you now get the chance to vote on the six most important categories (namely, the best game of not only each format, but also of the past year) while the remaining winners will be decided by a select panel of industry judges. Once the votes are in, it'll be time for another huge awards ceremony.

But now, on with the nominations...

GAME OF THE YEAR [READERS' CHOICE – CATEGORY A]

THERE CAN BE ONLY ONE...

We've sifted through the deluge of great games that have appeared over the last 12 months and whittled them down to a shortlist of just ten. But which of these top titles will ultimately be crowned games™ Game of the Year? That's where you come in...



- 01 Advance Wars 2: Black Hole Rising** [GBA]
The ingeniously quirky slant *Advance Wars* brought to strategy gaming came close to defining portable gameplay perfection, so it's no surprise the all-improved sequel stood out as one of the year's highlights.



- 02 F-Zero GX** [GameCube]
Bringing all the thrills of its breathtaking arcade counterpart to home consoles with aplomb, mind-blowing speeds are superbly balanced with compelling playability to deliver the most invigorating ride ever.



- 03 Far Cry** [PC]
Debut titles don't come much more impressive than Crytek's *Far Cry*. Aching gorgeous visuals, solid combat dynamics and frighteningly perceptive AI have already established the game as a true FPS great.



- 04 Hidden & Dangerous 2** [PC]
Mixing elements from the FPS, RTS and military squad-based genres, Illusion's masterpiece oozes quality in every department. Rarely will you see a game offer so much at such a consistently high standard.



- 05 Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time** [Multi]
Reinventing the platform genre for the new generation, the Prince's stunning return has received nothing but praise from around the industry for its wonderfully polished execution and gameplay genius.



- 06 Pro Evolution Soccer 3** [PlayStation2]
A favourite with football fanatics and gameplay connoisseurs alike, no other soccer title has been able to challenge Konami's dominance on the pitch in terms of fluidity, authenticity and good old-fashioned fun.



- 07 Project Gotham Racing 2** [Xbox]
Striking a perfect balance between authentic driving simulation and accessible high-speed action, is visually impressive masterpiece *PGR2* the definitive racing experience for both on- and offline gamers?



- 08 Rainbow Six 3** [Multiformat]
The finest outing for Tom Clancy's elite anti-terrorist unit to date, *R63*'s blend of solid FPS action and superbly intuitive squad control made tactical play accessible and gave the game instant online appeal.



- 09 Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow** [Multiformat]
In one of the year's biggest sequels, Sam Fisher was able to surpass his genre-defining first outing in style thanks to a lavish application of polish across the board and some fabulously innovative online play.



- 10 Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic** [Multi]
Hailed by many as the greatest *Star Wars* game ever created, *KOTOR* certainly offers players the most epic incarnation of the *Star Wars* universe in which to enjoy BioWare's inventive breed of RPG gameplay.

PC | GAME OF THE YEAR [READERS' CHOICE - CATEGORY B]

WHAT CLOCKED UP THE MOST CLICKS FOR YOU?

With PC technology advancing every day it can be a constant battle to keep your gaming machine at the cutting edge but, thanks to such impressive titles as these, it's been well worth keeping up with the pack.



- 01 Call Of Duty**
Taking the furious action and haunting atmosphere of the once great *Medal Of Honor* to a whole new level, *COD's* stirring intensity and cinematic style was a leap forward for the all-action end of the genre.



- 02 Championship Manager 03/04**
Much more than just a seasonal update, *CM03/04* is the polished gem *CM4* should have been, with the once-mechanical 2D match engine being refined into a fluid spectacle of one-touch football and individual flair.



- 03 Far Cry**
Far from being just a pretty face, Crytek's sublimely absorbing shooter breathes some much-needed vitality into the genre with its liberating non-linearity and the razor-sharp intelligence of your foes.



- 04 Hidden & Dangerous 2**
Whether you're a scrupulous strategist or master marksman, *H&D2* was one of the year's must-have titles. The various interfaces offered a myriad of tactical possibilities for taking on the superb enemy AI.



- 05 Rise Of Nations**
Taking players on an epic journey of societal and military development through the ages, *RON* combines elements from *Sid Meier's Civilization* with impressively diverse RTS battles from every era of history.

PLAYSTATION2 | GAME OF THE YEAR [READERS' CHOICE - CATEGORY C]

BEST OF THE BEST-SELLER'S BEST

Sony's machine continues to enjoy a huge lead in the console race, and the portfolio of great games responsible for this dominance has only been strengthened over the last 12 months thanks to gems such as these...



- 01 Disgaea: Hour Of Darkness**
It's been quite a year for tactical RPGs, but while much has been made of the countless examples appearing on the GBA it was PS2 gem *Disgaea* that arguably stood out as the genre's finest ambassador.



- 02 EyeToy: Play**
The EyeToy's contribution to the future of interactive gaming shouldn't be underestimated, and while *Play's* digital parlour games are incredibly simple they're also among the year's most entertaining.



- 03 Final Fantasy X-2**
The familiar *Final Fantasy* blueprint received yet another coat of polish and several welcome gameplay innovations to notch up another engrossing and visually sublime RPG adventure for the enduring series.



- 04 Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time**
In resurrecting the classic series, Ubi placed much of its emphasis on reintroducing us to the forgotten art of great gameplay while showcasing presentation values of the highest standard.



- 05 Pro Evolution Soccer 3**
The king of the soccer sims was in world-beating form once again on its return to the PS2. The unparalleled gameplay dynamics were in better shape than ever, giving the action a superbly realistic feel.

XBOX | GAME OF THE YEAR [READERS' CHOICE - CATEGORY D]

GIVING MICROSOFT'S BOX THE X-FACTOR

It's no doubt been a costly year for Xbox gamers thanks to the plethora of top titles your collection just wouldn't be complete without, but which of these big hitters was the undisputed pick of the bunch?



- 01 Grand Theft Auto: Double Pack**
Okay, so the titles in question may be old news to the gaming world at large, but it cannot be denied that the *GTA* games are a huge asset to the console and should be high on every Xbox owner's must-have list.



- 02 Project Gotham Racing 2**
One of greatest racing titles ever made, Bizarre Creations' masterpiece offers a delightfully accessible slant on realistic vehicle handling that delivers some of the most satisfying racing on any system.



- 03 Rainbow Six 3**
Tactical squad-based shooters don't come much better than this. The ability to quickly initiate strategic manoeuvres via headset or pad without any let-up in the action superbly tests both brawn and brain.



- 04 Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow**
The welcome return of Sam Fisher showcased numerous refinements over the original game, introduced a series of innovative gameplay elements, and staged the action across a range of imaginative settings.

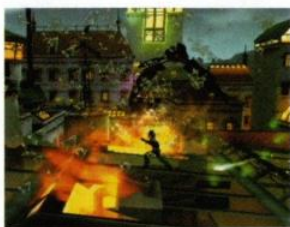


- 05 Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic**
Wonderfully accessible implementation of RPG conventions, an involving non-linear storyline and imaginative use of the *Star Wars* licence ensure the Force is strong here.

GAMECUBE | GAME OF THE YEAR [READERS' CHOICE - CATEGORY E]

PROVING IT'S STILL HIP TO BE SQUARE

It's been a tough year for Nintendo's struggling Cube, but merely glancing at the enticing selection of big-name exclusives and superb multiformat conversions to arrive on the console over the last year you have to wonder why...



01 Beyond Good & Evil
Flying the flag for gameplay innovation, Ubi's highly original adventure defied categorisation with its unique elements being skilfully blended together in a way not dissimilar to that of the recent *Zelda* titles.



02 F-Zero GX
Another generation, another tremendous *F-Zero* title for Nintendo's home console. Harnessing the full extent of the Cube's processing power, could this become the series' most memorable incarnation yet?



03 Mario Kart: Double Dash!!
The plucky plumber and his gang made an emphatic dash to the rescue of Nintendo's struggling console with a fantastic *Mario Kart* title that superbly recaptured the inspired form of the 1992 original.



04 Soul Calibur II
Arguably the finest one-on-one fighting game of the year made a stunning transition to the Cube with accomplished visuals, fantastic gameplay and a surprisingly strong showing from bonus character Link.



05 Viewtiful Joe
Capcom's stylish 2D side-scroller may be hard as nails at times, but it stands out as one of the year's heroes of originality with vibrant aesthetics, sublime animation and playability of the highest order.

GBA | GAME OF THE YEAR [READERS' CHOICE - CATEGORY F]

MINIATURE MASTERPIECES ON THE MOVE

Nintendo's handheld enjoyed another year of complete dominance in the field of portable gaming, and the calibre of last year's software releases have placed the console in a strong position for its impending battle with the PSP.



01 Advance Wars 2: Black Hole Rising
The cutesy *Advance Wars* armies continued to battle it out with the cream of the GBA must-have list, mounting a serious claim on the top spot with their tanks and their bombs and their guns.



02 Fire Emblem
Another bout of epic warfare on Nintendo's pint-sized system from the *Advance Wars* stable, this time with much more of an RPG flavour. *Fire Emblem* added yet more irresistible strategy to the GBA's portfolio, as well as eating up much of our free time.



03 Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga
Proving that two heads are always better than one, this inventive title showcased the best of both platform and RPG genres and demanded clever teamwork from the simultaneously controlled plumbing brothers.



04 Metroid: Zero Mission
A stunning update of the original NES *Metroid* game, *Zero Mission* sports fabulously detailed visuals and superbly wholesome gameplay that pushes the boundaries of the action genre on Nintendo's ubiquitous handheld.



05 Wario Ware, Inc.: Mega Microgame\$
As ingenious as it is bizarre, Nintendo's collection of diverse mini-games ranges from the unthinkable weird to bite-sized versions of Nintendo classics, resulting in a wonderfully unique gaming experience.

STAND UP AND BE COUNTED

THE NOMINATIONS ARE IN, BUT WHICH ONES DO YOU THINK DESERVE VICTORY?

And that about wraps it up for the reader portion of the awards. You can vote in each of the six categories listed above, and then once we've collated all the entries the winners will be announced at our gala awards ceremony taking place in August. Registering your vote couldn't be simpler - all you need is access to a computer, an email programme and an internet connection...

Look closely at the categories and nominations above and you'll see that each one has been allocated a letter

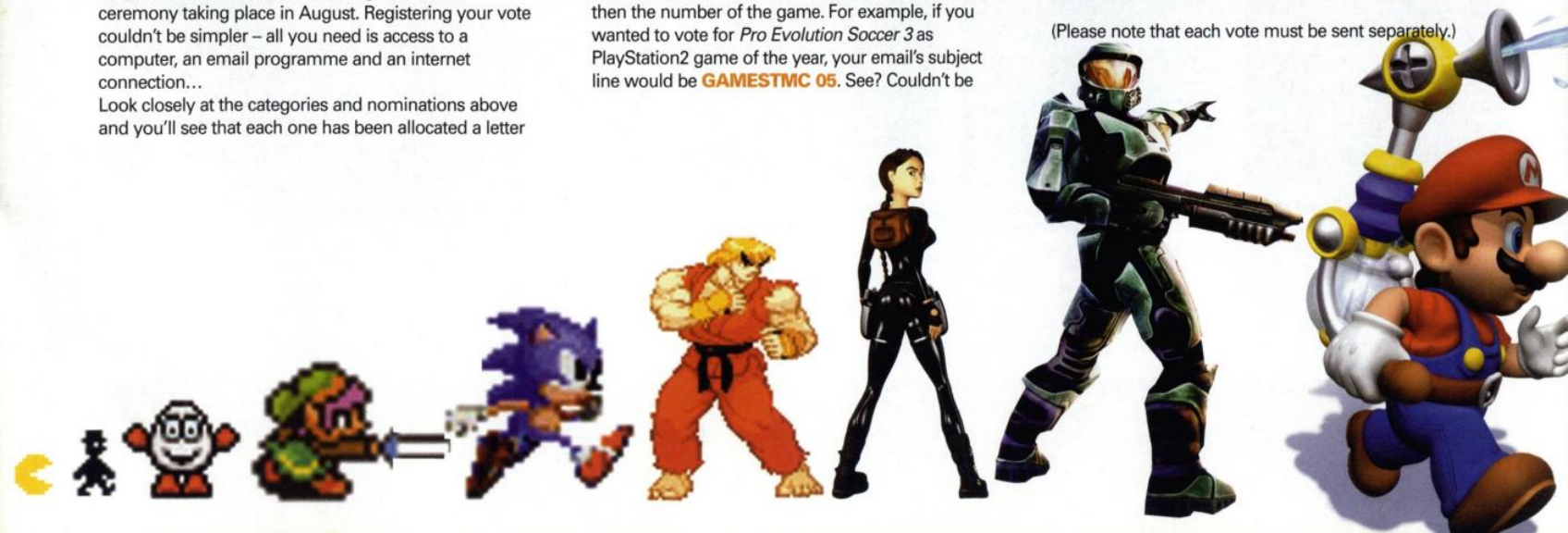
and number respectively.

To make your opinion heard, you simply have to send at email with a subject line of **GAMESTM** followed by the letter of the category, a space and then the number of the game. For example, if you wanted to vote for *Pro Evolution Soccer 3* as PlayStation2 game of the year, your email's subject line would be **GAMESTM C 05**. See? Couldn't be

easier.

Just type in your vote, then send your email to vote@paragonpublishing.com.au and have your say...

(Please note that each vote must be sent separately.)



BEST MOBILE PHONE GAME [SPONSORED BY O2]

WHICH MOBILE PHONE GAME REALLY RANG OUR BELL?

The N-Gage might not have enjoyed the success Nokia had predicted, but the platform led the way as mobile gaming was catapulted to new heights over the last year...



Splinter Cell
[N-Gage]
A faithful port of Sam Fisher's impressive GBA outing, the N-Gage adaptation managed to cleverly translate almost all of the gameplay elements from Ubi's definitive stealth title into a simplified 2D framework.



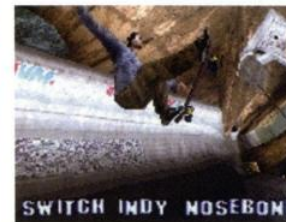
Prince Of Persia: Sands Of Time
[Java]
After successfully bringing the Prince's classic adventures to the mobile phone, Gameloft returned with another highly polished platform swashbuckler – this time a superb 2D adaptation of *Sands Of Time*.



Tomb Raider
[N-Gage]
The game that brought the N-Gage's visual capabilities to the attention of the world, *Tomb Raider* was an ambitious remake of the 1996 best-selling original that did a great job of emulating the PSone's power.



XIII
[Java]
The console versions of Ubi's comic-book shooter weren't without their faults, but the game made a very impressive transition to a traditional 2D side-scrolling blast-fest thanks to the talent at Gameloft.



Tony Hawk's Pro Skater
[N-Gage]
Another PSone remake brought superbly to life by the N-Gage, *Pro Skater* gave all the kick-flipping joys of the original to gamers on the move and made full use of the wireless multiplayer capabilities.

BEST USE OF LICENCE

NOT ALL LICENSED GAMES ARE DESTINED TO DISAPPOINT...

Enter *The Matrix*, *Terminator 3*, *Bad Boys II*... need we go on? Sadly, big-name endorsements are increasingly becoming synonymous with lazy implementation, but there have been some notable exceptions to the rule...



Rainbow Six 3
[Multiplatform]
Tom Clancy's novels have given rise to some incredibly popular videogame franchises, with the adventures of elite anti-terrorist team Rainbow Six providing the inspiration for one of this year's finest titles.



SingStar
[PlayStation2]
Taking the interactive karaoke concept popularised by Konami up several octaves, Sony's offering has an impressive line-up of licensed tracks accompanied by the original videos in the background.



Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic [Multi]
BioWare emphatically succeeded where so many others have failed in the past by creating a game worthy of the illustrious *Star Wars* licence and delivering everything we'd hoped a Jedi-themed RPG could be.



Tony Hawk's Underground
[Multiformat]
One series that actually delivers the level of quality implied by its namesake is the *Tony Hawk* franchise, with *Underground* continuing to exemplify the genre in the same way its patron once dominated the sport.



TRON 2.0
[PC]
While an updated version of the *TRON* universe didn't sound like the ideal FPS setting, an inspired artistic revamp and several inventive gameplay elements saw the licence employed to phenomenal effect.

BEST COMEBACK

CLASSIC TITLES BROUGHT BACK FROM THE GRAVE IN STYLE

More and more of our favourite titles from yesteryear are being signed up to undergo modern-day revamps, and there are plenty of success stories to show that these classics can indeed be lovingly restored to their former glory.



F-Zero GX
[GameCube]
The original futuristic racer made an emphatic return to the helm of the genre courtesy of Amusement Vision. Magnificently reworked for the new generation, *GX* upholds the principles of its ancestry in style.



Ninja Gaiden
[Xbox]
The long-awaited resurrection of the excellent *Ninja Gaiden* series was clearly a labour of love for Team Ninja, which has lavished a huge amount of polish on both the gratifying combat and lush visuals.



Out Run 2
[Arcade]
Everyone's favourite Eighties arcade racer finally received a sequel some 17 years down the track, which managed to retain the original's superbly accessible appeal but with a dazzling 21st Century paint job.



Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time [Multi]
Jordan Mechner's classic 2D platform series helped define a genre back in its day and Ubi's 3D revamp proved to be no less influential, sticking firmly to its traditions of exquisite gameplay and polished animation.



R-Type Final
[PlayStation2]
A swansong for the timeless shoot-'em-up series, *R-Type Final* placed over a hundred different ships at your disposal and pitted you against the Bydo Empire for the final time in a stylish old-school blast fest.

BEST | OFFLINE MULTIPLAYER

WHO NEEDS BROADBAND WHEN YOU'VE GOT REAL FRIENDS?

With broadband fever engulfing the nation, are the days of huddling around one console over? Not if these social gaming gems have anything to do with it, but which is the biggest reason for getting your mates round?



Advance Wars 2: Black Hole Rising [GBA]
Whether via the wonders of the link cable or taking turns with a single machine, waging war against up to three friends with your miniature militia is one of the most addictive concepts in handheld gaming.



Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance II [Multiformat]
Black Isle's fabulously engrossing action RPG is twice the fun when you've got a companion to share your adventures with, providing your party with some helpful back-up on the perilous battlefields.



Mario Kart: Double Dash!! [GameCube]
Brimming with entertainment in single-player mode, *Double Dash!!* goes into overdrive when you throw a couple of mates into the equation. You'll be merrily harking back to the glory days of the SNES in no time...



Pro Evolution Soccer 3 [PlayStation2]
The only way to experience the world's greatest football game in all its glory, multiplayer matches become increasingly compelling with every encounter and fully showcase this game's unrivalled playability.



Top Spin [Xbox]
PAM's exquisite tennis sim superbly balances instant accessibility with an incredible depth of mastery, making for equally thrilling four-player action whether you're a beginner or a pro.

BEST | ONLINE MULTIPLAYER

WHAT'S THE SINGLE BIGGEST REASON FOR GETTING ONLINE?

This year saw a boom in online console gaming as thousands of Xbox and PS2 owners joined the legions of PC gamers already taking on the world, but which platform played host to the year's finest online experience?



Battlefield Vietnam [PC]
With *Battlefield 1942* still among the most compulsively playable online titles of all time, how could the all-improved *BV* fail to succeed with the added potential of its rich new settings and tantalising vehicle types?



Project Gotham Racing 2 [Xbox]
Arguably Xbox Live's most prized asset, the online component of Bizarre Creations' exquisitely tuned racer is unrivalled on any platform for multiplayer action that's as high on thrills as it is on skills.



Rainbow Six 3 [Multiformat]
The solid combat engine and cleverly designed maps make *R63* a strong contender for traditional online blasting, but it's the superb squad-based co-operative play that really sets this apart from the crowd.



Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow [Multiformat]
Rather than settling for the standard online modes you'd expect from a *Tom Clancy* title, Ubi has devised a fabulously innovative game that superbly employs the skilful stealth play for which the series is renowned.



Unreal Tournament 2004 [PC]
The introduction of vehicle play gives rise to some of the most riveting battles ever to grace the series' superbly designed arenas, while sticking firmly to the irresistible all-action flavour of the *UT* legacy.

BEST | VISUALS

PUSHING THOSE PIXELS AND POLYGONS HARDER THAN EVER

Beauty may only be skin deep – especially in gaming where eye-candy has notoriously been used as a front for shoddy gameplay – but more often than not, polished visuals remain the cornerstone of a great game experience.



Far Cry [PC]
After originating as a technical demo for Nvidia graphics cards, it's no surprise that *Far Cry* became one of the year's most visually outstanding titles with its incredible draw distances and gloriously rich textures.



F-Zero GX [GameCube]
In maintaining such strikingly crisp visuals and a consistent frame rate at blistering speeds, *F-Zero GX* is both an astounding technical achievement and one of the most aesthetically appealing Cube titles around.



Grabbed By The Ghoulies [Xbox]
Rare's quirky action adventure may have failed to sparkle in terms of gameplay, but by harnessing the full graphical capabilities of the Xbox so vibrantly it gave us one of the year's most stylish games.



Max Payne [GBA]
Mobius worked little short of a technological miracle in bringing all the joys of *Bullet Time* to Nintendo's handheld machine, delivering gameplay and 3D visuals unlike anything the GBA has been able to handle before.



Ninja Gaiden [Xbox]
Along with its impressive gameplay, *Ninja Gaiden* didn't disappoint in the visuals department. Solidly polished throughout, the game has some of the best bosses and FMV sequences on any console.

BEST SOUND

PUTTING THE ICING ON THE CAKE OF A GREAT GAME

Not content with supplying us with mere background noise, these titles made us sit up and listen from the start with their exquisite soundtracks, but which had us cranking up the volume to the max?



Battlefield Vietnam [PC]

A playlist featuring classic tracks from The Kinks, The Troggs and Jefferson Airplane gives *BV* one of the most rousing musical scores in gaming, not to mention the vivid effects bringing the battlefield to life.



F-Zero GX [GameCube]

With striking effects that so vibrantly complement the eye-popping speeds and a musical score featuring inspired updates of tunes from the original game, *GX*'s uplifting audio experience takes some beating.



Fatal Frame 2: Crimson Butterfly [PlayStation2]

Atmosphere is everything in Tecmo's psychological horror series, and the haunting effects throughout *Crimson Butterfly* never disappoint in lacing the air with tension and building to some terrifying crescendos.



Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles [GameCube]

With a title track to die for and divine music adorning every last inch of the game, the *Crystal Chronicles* soundtrack injects a fabulously cheery mood into proceedings that lifts the whole experience superbly.



Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time [Multi]

Rounding off one of the most thoroughly polished titles of the year, *The Sands Of Time* certainly didn't let the side down when it came to sound with its crisp effects and wonderful atmosphere generation.

BEST DEVELOPER

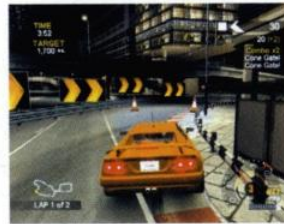
CELEBRATING THE BRAINS BEHIND THE OPERATION

Burning the candle at both ends to bring us bigger and better gaming experiences, here's the pick of those unsung heroes whose vision, talent and hard work is responsible for driving the industry forward.



BioWare

The talented Canadian developer brought the *Star Wars* universe to life superbly with *Knights Of The Old Republic*, innovating with RPG conventions and laying strong foundations for its next project, *Jade Empire*.



Bizarre Creations

With *Project Gotham Racing 2*, Liverpool-based studio Bizarre Creations gave us the finest driving game of the year and cemented its name in the history books as one of the genre's all-time great developers.



Intelligent Systems

Dominating the handheld market this year with magnificent strategy epics *Advance Wars 2* and *Fire Emblem*, Intelligent Systems has exemplified how the limited power of the GBA can be fully harnessed.



Ion Storm

In weaving the rich fabric of the *Deus Ex: Invisible War* game world, with its mind-boggling web of possible routes and cutting edge visual effects, Ion Storm produced some of the year's most impressive work.



Ubisoft

Most of Ubisoft's in-house titles have involved collaboration between its worldwide network of studios, with the likes of *Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow* employing the talents of the Paris, Montreal and Shanghai teams.

BEST PUBLISHER

WHOSE PORTFOLIO BOASTED AN ALL-STAR CAST?

We've rounded up the publishing houses responsible for bringing us the year's finest titles, but who's combined collection accounted for the greatest number of this year's golden gaming moments?



Activision

Activision has enjoyed a hugely successful year with the likes of *THUG*, *Call Of Duty* and *Knights Of The Old Republic*, and with *Rome: Total War* and *The Movies* on the horizon the future looks very bright indeed.



Electronic Arts

EA has completely dominated the charts over the past year with its portfolio of prestigious franchises, and the trend looks set to continue after snapping up the rights to the *TimeSplitters* and *Burnout* games.



Microsoft

Thanks to such tremendous titles as *Project Gotham Racing 2*, *Ninja Gaiden* and *Rise Of Nations* it's been a great year for Microsoft, and with the likes of *Halo 2* on the way next year could be even better.



Nintendo

As well as bringing us an impressive proportion of the finest titles to hit the GBA over the last year, Nintendo was also responsible for the return of flagship franchises *Mario Kart* and *F-Zero* on the Cube.



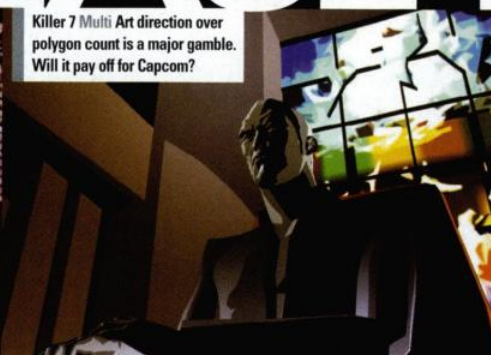
Ubisoft

With the likes of *Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time*, *Far Cry* and *Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow* among its portfolio of outstanding titles, Ubi has given us some of the year's most impressive games.

RELEASE LISTS



Ninja Gaiden Xbox We check out Ryu on page 96



Killer 7 Multi Art direction over polygon count is a major gamble. Will it pay off for Capcom?



Harvest Moon Cube As far as Ubisoft is concerned, it most certainly is a wonderful life

games™ MOST PLAYED

SPLINTER CELL: PANDORA TOMORROW

Format: Xbox
Publisher: Ubisoft

Online or off, we simply can't get enough of Sam Fisher's sneaky ways. The quintessential stealth title, *Pandora Tomorrow* has raised standards within the genre and left Solid Snake with a lot to prove. We've even bought our own night-vision goggles – you know, just in case...



FIRE EMBLEM

Format: Game Boy Advance
Publisher: Nintendo

All hail the king of strategy, the GBA. Whether it's *Advance Wars*, *Tactics Ogre* or *FFTA*, you can guarantee that at least one handheld in the office is set to thinking mode. Current flavour of the month is the latest instalment in the *Fire Emblem* series. However long we play, the action just keeps coming.



BEYOND GOOD & EVIL

Format: Multiformat
Publisher: Ubisoft

It's amazing what a difference a few pounds can make. Since the wise decision to drop the price of both *Prince of Persia* and Michel Ancel's quirky adventure for their multiformat releases, the two games have been selling like proverbial hot cakes. Just like they deserved to from day one, really. When will people learn, eh?



PLAYSTATION2

Month	Title	Publisher
MAY '04		
3 May	Euro 2004	EA
6 May	Van Helsing	Vivendi
7 May	R-Type Final	Ice Storm
7 May	Riding Spirits 2	THQ
7 May	Way of the Samurai 2	THQ
13 May	Hitman: Contracts	Eidos
13 May	Transformers	Atari
14 May	Seven Samurai	SEGA
21 May	SingStar Bundle	Sony
27 May	Showdown: LOW	Acclaim
28 May	Deadly Skies 3	Konami
31 May	Harry Potter: Prisoner of Azkaban	EA
TBC	The Suffering	Midway
TBC	This is Soccer 2004	Sony
JUNE '04		
4 June	Hyper Street Fighter II	Capcom
4 June	Onimusha Blade Warriors	Capcom
11 June	Risk: Global Domination	Atari
11 June	Samurai Jack	SEGA
18 June	.Hack Vol. 2: Mutation	Atari
18 June	MTV Music Generator	Codemasters
18 June	Smash Court Tennis Pro Tour. 2	Sony
24 June	X-Files: Resist or Serve	Vivendi
25 June	Eternal Quest	Ice Storm
25 June	Football Generation	Ice Storm
25 June	Retro Arcade	Ice Storm
25 June	Rollercoaster World	Ice Storm
25 June	Ultimate Mind Games	Ice Storm
25 June	X-Treme Speed	Ice Storm
TBC	DRIV3R	Atari
TBC	Formula One 2004	Sony
TBC	Shellshock Nam 67	Eidos
TBC	Syphon Filter: The Omega Strain	Sony
TBC	TT Superbikes	QVS

JULY '04		
9 July	Combat Elite: WWII Paratroopers	Acclaim
16 July	Onimusha 3	Capcom
16 July	Richard Burns Rally	SCI
23 July	Crimson Tears	THQ
26 July	Catwoman	EA
30 July	Athens 2004 Olympic Games	Sony
AUGUST '04		
27 August	Headhunter: Redemption	SEGA
SEPTEMBER '04		
1 September	Worms Forts: Under Siege	SEGA
3 September	Ribbit King	Atari
9 September	Juiced	Acclaim
24 September	RedStar	Acclaim
26 September	Resident Evil: Outbreak	Capcom

TBC	Gradius V	Konami
TBC	Karaoke Stage	Konami
TBC	Silent Hill 4	Konami
04 '04		
TBC	Trivial Pursuit Unhinged	Atari
TBC	100 Bullets	Acclaim



GAMECUBE

Month	Title	Publisher
MAY '04		
31 May	Harry Potter: Prisoner of Azkaban	EA
JUNE '04		
11 June	Samurai Jack	SEGA
18 June	Phantasy Star Online 3	SEGA
24 June	Pokemon Colosseum	Nintendo
03 '04		
26 July	Catwoman	EA
3 September	Ribbit King	Eidos
04 '04		
TBC	Serious Sam: Next Encounter	Global Star
TBC	Mario Tennis	Nintendo
TBC	Wario Ware Inc. Mega Party Game\$	Nintendo
TBC	Killer 7	Capcom
TBC	Paper Mario	Nintendo
TBC	Spy Vs Spy	TDK
TBC	Geist	Nintendo
TBC	Terminator 3: Redemption	Atari
TBC	Donkey Konga	Nintendo
TBC	Nintendo Puzzle Collection	Nintendo
TBC	Pikmin 2	Nintendo



XBOX

Month	Title	Publisher
MAY '04		
3 May	Euro 2004	EA
5 May	Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles	Konami
6 May	Van Helsing	Vivendi
13 May	Hitman: Contracts	Eidos
21 May	Ninja Gaiden	Microsoft
21 May	Rallisport Challenge 2	Microsoft
27 May	Showdown: LOW	Acclaim
31 May	Harry Potter: Prisoner of Azkaban	EA
TBC	The Suffering	Midway

CALM YOUR FEVERISH ANTICIPATION WITH OUR COMPREHENSIVE LIST OF FORTHCOMING RELEASES

Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater PS2 Page 48 hides more details...

Painkiller PC Doom, Serious Sam and now this - has People Can Fly perfected the all-action no-brainer?

Thief: Deadly Shadows Multi It may still be skulking but we've seen it...

Hitman: Contracts Multi Agent 47 returns to dish out 29 times the pain

JUNE '04

11 June	Samurai Jack	SEGA
14 June	Breakdown	EA
18 June	MTV Music Generator 3	Codemasters
25 June	Automodellista US Tuned	Capcom
25 June	Full Spectrum Warrior	THQ
25 June	Shadow Ops: Red Mercury	Atari
25 June	Sitting Ducks	Ice Storm
TBC	DRIV3R	Atari
TBC	Galleon	SCi
TBC	Shellshock Nam 67	Eidos
TBC	Thief 3	Eidos

JULY '04

9 July	Combat Elite: WWII Paratroopers	Acclaim
16 July	Richard Burns Rally	SCi
26 July	Catwoman	EA

AUGUST '04

27 August	Headhunter: Redemption	SEGA
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SEPTEMBER '04

1 September	Worms Forts: Under Siege	SEGA
9 September	Juiced	Acclaim
24 September	Red Star	Acclaim
TBC	Chronicles of Riddick	Vivendi
TBC	Silent Hill 4	Atari
TBC	Sudeki	Microsoft

Q4 '04

TBC	100 Bullets	Acclaim
TBC	Dungeon Lords	QVS
TBC	Fable	Microsoft
TBC	Halo 2	Microsoft
TBC	Painkiller	QVS



PC

Month	Title	Publisher
MAY '04		
1 May	V8 Supercars 2	Codemasters
3 May	Euro 2004	EA
13 May	Hitman: Contracts	Eidos
14 May	Painkiller	QVS
18 May	Joint Operations	EA
21 May	Perimeter	Codemasters
21 May	Rugby Pro Manager	QVS
27 May	Showdown: LOW	Acclaim
28 May	Battle for Troy	Ice Storm
31 May	Harry Potter: Prisoner of Azkaban	EA
JUNE '04		
18 June	Soldiers: Heroes of WW2	Codemasters
21 June	Warlords Battlecry 3	QVS
25 June	Crisis Team Ambulance Driver	Ice Storm
TBC	DRIV3R	Atari
TBC	Shellshock Nam 67	Eidos

TBC	Thief 3	Eidos
TBC	YuGiOh: Power of Chaos Ver. 3	Konami

JULY '04

2 July	NHL Eastside Hockey Manager	SEGA
7 July	TT Superbikes	QVS
8 July	Ground Control 2	Vivendi
23 July	Catwoman	EA

AUGUST '04

7 August	Dark Fall II	QVS
10 August	Madden 2005	EA

SEPTEMBER '04

1 September	Wartime Command	Codemasters
1 September	Worms Forts: Under Siege	SEGA
7 September	Armies of Exigo	EA
7 September	Blitzkrieg II	QVS
9 September	Juiced	Acclaim
20 September	Tiger Woods 2005	EA
21 September	Codename: Panzers	QVS
TBC	Full Spectrum Warrior	THQ

Q4 '04

1 October	Deer Hunter 2005	Atari
5 October	NBA Live 2005	EA
TBC	RollerCoaster Tycoon 3	Atari



GAME BOY ADVANCE

Month	Title	Publisher
MAY '04		
6 May	Van Helsing	Vivendi
7 May	Shining Force	THQ
28 May	Boktai: Sun is in your hands	Konami
31 May	Harry Potter: Prisoner of Azkaban	EA
JUNE '04		
11 June	Duel Masters: Sempai Legends	Atari
25 June	Sonic Advance 3	THQ
JULY '04		
1 July	Crash Bandicoot Fusion	Vivendi
1 July	Spyro Fusion	Vivendi
2 July	DBZ Supersonic Warriors	Atari
26 July	Catwoman	EA
AUGUST '04		
27 August	Digimon Battle Spirits 2	Atari
TBC	Megaman Battle NT 4 Blue/Red	THQ
SEPTEMBER '04		
10 September	Megaman Zero 3	THQ
17 September	Zoids: Legacy	Atari
TBC	Banjo Pilot	THQ
TBC	YuGiOh: Reshef of Destruction	Konami

PLEASE NOTE: While every effort has been made to ensure these dates are correct at the time of going to press, they are liable to change at short notice. It's not our fault, mind. We just print what we're told...

games™ ON THE HORIZON

VIB RIPPLE

Format: PlayStation 2
Publisher: SCEJ

Fans of Vibri and his crazy literal take on line dancing may still be waiting to hear whether or not *Mojib Ribbon* will be translated, but in the East the masses are waiting for this next quirky title. Finding hidden items in pictures from your linked-up camera seems to be the principal concept. Yes, we're confused too.



SECOND SIGHT

Format: Multiformat
Publisher: TBC

It'll be interesting to see where the coming months take Free Radical's latest project - anything less than a major publisher would be criminal. With the style of *TimeSplitters* and bursting with more original ideas than we've space to list, this could definitely be a major sleeper hit this year.



DRAKENGARD

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: TBC

Known as *Drag-On Dragoon* in Japan, Square Enix's dragon-fuelled adventure is more and more likely to get a PAL release with every one of the developer's quirky titles that finds its way onto our shelves. Mixed reviews and *Dynasty Warriors* comparisons don't fill us with hope, but we'll wait until we can form our own opinions.



LINK TANK

THE PEOPLE
IN THE
GAMES
INDUSTRY
TELL IT LIKE
IT IS...

GETTING STARTED:

MICHAEL KOLODZINSKI – Marketing Director, THQ Asia Pacific

I began as a Marketing Assistant with Protector Safety then moved to Fletcher Building as a Product Manager. I then joined Monaco Corp. on the Casio account team and eventually took over as Group Product Manager for Nintendo. A year later I was promoted to Marketing Manager for Nintendo, TDK and Little Tikes. We launched GBA and GameCube in NZ and developed the All Blacks GBA with the NZRFU and Nintendo. In 2003 Monaco took on the THQ agency and the rest, as they say, is history...

ESTELLE CLEAVER-WILKINSON – PR & Promotions Manager, THQ Asia Pacific

With a background in politics, hospitality, music and childcare, I moved to the Outback in 1999 to finish my Journalism degree. Living in north WA, I worked as a newspaper and TV news reporter. Back in Melbourne, and after three interviews, a brilliant press release and an ambitious PR & Promotional plan, I found myself in the video games industry! Moral of the story: If you really want the job, have faith in your abilities and offer to prove it!

ELIZABETH KOTEVSKA – Product Manager, THQ Asia Pacific

After obtaining my Bachelor of Business (Marketing) at Swinburne University, I worked as a Buyer's Assistant at Figgins, and then later at Pacific Dunlop as a Brand Manager. In 1998 I joined JNH Australia as a Product Development Manager working with kids licenses. This licensing experience landed me the job at THQ in 2001. I now look after marketing our licensed kids product including Disney/Pixar, Nickelodeon, and Mattel.

DANIEL ARMSTRONG – Product Manager, THQ Asia Pacific

One morning I woke up and found I hated my job. Naturally I didn't go in to work that day – or ever again. Time passed and the necessity to earn money prompted me to look for a job. I replied to an ad in the paper that said "Work in the ENTERTAINMENT industry", which I thought sounded like fun. When I found out it was for a Video Game Publisher I thought "way cool". Things have rolled on from there and now here I am in the middle of a career in Video Games.

[Editor's note: Dan worked at Acclaim for over 3 years, joining THQ in 2003.]

FROM THE FRONT

MIXED FORTUNES FOR BRITISH COMPANIES THIS MONTH, WHILE SONY DOMINATES THE HARDWARE NEWS



Big Mutha Truckers was a hit for Empire.



Bad Boys II – critics hate it, gamers seem to like it...



Link all your Sony toys together. If you like.



EMPIRE'S ON THE UP, BUT ARGONAUT TAKES A TUMBLE

MOVERS AND SHAKERS

As British developers and publishers struggle to stay afloat in an increasingly competitive market, it's nice to see the likes of Empire Interactive gradually starting to turn a profit. The North Finchley-based publisher has announced revenues of £30.4 million thanks to the success of several key titles.

"We are very pleased with the progress the group has made during the current year," said Empire's chief executive, Ian Higgins.

"The success of products such as *Starsky & Hutch* and *Big Mutha Truckers* creates franchises for the group which helps build value for future titles." Empire's revenues are

now up an impressive 35 per cent on last year and its profit for this year has been £600,000. While this may not sound too impressive compared to amounts brought in by the likes of Take 2 and EA, it's a huge improvement on the £2.9 million loss that was recorded last year.

While Empire is turning its fortunes around, the same cannot be said for Argonaut. Despite having three titles ready for Christmas, the interim results for the six months prior to the end of January have shown a greater loss than the previous financial year. Argonaut revealed a total pre-tax loss of £2.4 million on a turnover of £4.4

"THE SUCCESS OF PRODUCTS SUCH AS STARSKY & HUTCH CREATES FRANCHISES WHICH BUILDS VALUE FOR FUTURE TITLES"

PSP TO LINK TO SONY PRODUCTS

SONY REVEALS CONNECTIVITY FOR THE PSP

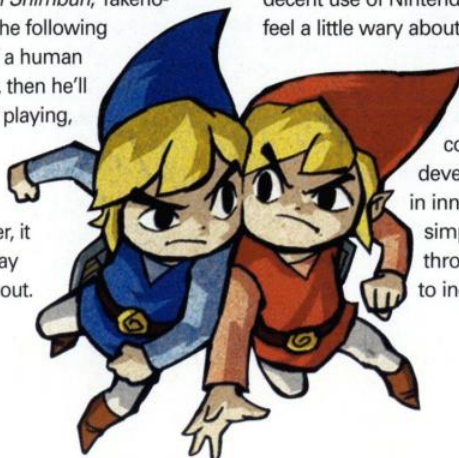
Despite Nintendo's current batch of GameCube-to-GBA connectivity games being mostly underwhelming, Sony Japan's president, Fumiya Takeno, has revealed we can expect similar things from the PSP.

In a recent interview with Japanese newspaper *Mainichi Shimbun*, Takeno-san came out with the following cryptic message: "If a human being wants to play, then he'll create some way of playing, whether it be cards or whatever. Since the PS2 and PSP will also link together, it could change the way games are planned out."

You could have a PS2 in your room, a PSX in the living room and a PSP for outdoors, and one game could fuse all these platforms together and alter itself for each location."

It's certainly intriguing, but after witnessing how many games actually make decent use of Nintendo's device, we can't help feel a little wary about Sony's latest

revelation. One of the biggest problems that Sony will face is convincing third-party developers to use the device in innovative ways and not simply using it as a throwaway gadget in order to increase sales





million, which is a far cry from the £1.1 million loss of last year against an even greater turnover of £6.9 million.

But things are starting to look up for Argonaut thanks to a potentially huge franchise deal with EA and the long-awaited releases of several projects. *Carve*, *Powerdrome* and *Malice* should all hit the shelves by the end of this month and *Catwoman* marks yet another collaboration with EA (*Harry Potter* is still a strong seller on the PSone). We've lost count of the number of British developers and publishers that have disappeared over the past year. Here's hoping that we don't have to add Empire and Argonaut to an ever-growing list...



■ *Starsky & Hutch* is now the first game in a series – expect the next instalment in autumn.



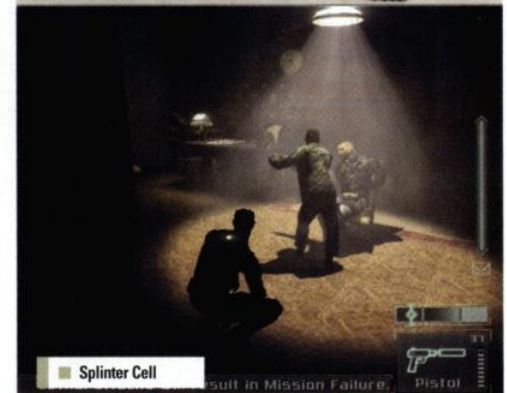
■ Argonaut hopes new titles will boost its fortunes.

MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	V8 Supercars 2	Atari	Xbox
2	Simpsons Hit & Run	Vivendi	PS2
3	The Sims Deluxe	EA Games	PC/MAC
4	Splinter Cell Pandora Tomorrow	Ubisoft	Xbox
5	Need For Speed: Underground	EA Games	PS2
6	The Sims Superstar	EA Games	PC/MAC
7	GTA Twin Pack	Take 2	Xbox
8	SOCOM: US Navy SEALs (Ptm)	SCEE	PS2
9	Simpsons Hit & Run	Vivendi	Xbox
10	The Sims Unleashed	EA Games	PC/MAC

Another good month for EA – and the Xbox. Sam Fisher has slipped to #4 but the lure of racing Bathurst in a V8 has been strong. Then there's *The Sims*, the game that just keeps selling. Bring on *The Sims 2*, we say...

All information is compiled by and remains the strict copyright of Inform Ltd. Australian Top 10 – All Full Priced Games (w/e 18 April 2004)



SONY'S PSX NOT HERE YET

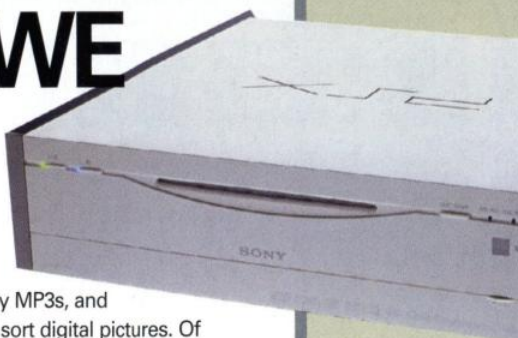
WHY ARE WE WAITING?

While Sony has been reluctant to reveal an exact release date for the PSX and has offered little more than a "no comment", we're expecting the PSX to be out in Australia by the end of 2004. Sony's multi-functional system caused controversy in Japan when it was released before Christmas without many of its key features. An upgrade was eventually put out and it's this version of the machine that we're expecting to see in Australia.

As many will know, the PSX is Sony's attempt to break into the more expansive home-entertainment market and is basically a glorified PlayStation2

with the ability to record DVDs, play MP3s, and store and sort digital pictures. Of course, the most important thing gamers will want to know is the PSX's price, but again Sony is remaining extremely tight-lipped.

However, considering it will be launched as a home-entertainment system and not a console, we're expecting it to cost between \$1000 and \$1500. It's well known that the PSX is occupying an area that Microsoft is already interested in so the American giant will watch the launch with interest.



■ You might have one of these in your house by the end of the year. Nice.



THE MATRIX ONLINE

"THE MATRIX ONLINE IS THE PERFECT PROPERTY TO SHOWCASE WARNER BROS. STUDIOS' INCREASING INVOLVEMENT IN INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT"

KEVIN TSUJIHARA, EXECUTIVE VP, WARNER BROS ENTERTAINMENT

■ The Agents are still a big problem inside The Matrix and, as we all know, everyone who has fought an Agent has died...

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

"WHY, OH WHY DIDN'T I TAKE THE BLUE PILL?"



MMORPG



ORCS



THE MATRIX



MATRIX ONLINE

■ You might have the moves, but anyone thinking that they'll get to be The One should put those thoughts out of their head right now; there is only one, after all.

DEVELOPER PROFILE

MONOLITH

■ Founded in October 1994, Monolith Productions has gone from being a newcomer with interests in developing and publishing to being exclusively concerned with independent development for a wide variety of partners. In February 2002, the company set up LithTech Inc, a technology subsidiary focused on the creation of advanced 3D development systems.

HISTORY

- **CONTRACT JACK** 2003 [PC]
- **TRON 2.0** 2003 [PC]
- **NO-ONE LIVES FOREVER 2** 2002 [PC]

WHO NEEDS THE ONE WHEN YOU CAN HAVE MILLIONS?

So, we've sat through all three movies, bought the anime DVD, listened to the soundtrack, worn the sunglasses and even tried our hand at a few of the moves (albeit at the cost of our physical wellbeing) – but what exactly is The Matrix? Yes, we know that 'no-one can be told what The Matrix is', but before you try to quote us expansive blocks from the script, you might want to stop and think about it. Millions of people, all locked away in a darkened place, linked to a central computer that creates a fantasy world for them to live in... just toss in a few goblin hordes and that sounds a whole lot like a massively multiplayer online RPG to us.

Of course, up to now the videogames world has taken a rather different approach to the *Matrix* licence. Shunning a cerebral approach for the more smash-mouth 'let's have loads of action going on all at once' style that Atari seems to favour at the moment, the only offering we've seen (Shiny's *Enter The Matrix*) sacrificed substance in the name of style. Thankfully, it looks as though the next game to take up

the *Matrix* gauntlet might actually be able to do it some justice, by taking the most obvious route possible and being an MMORPG. Makes you wonder why no-one thought of it in the first place...

Developed by Seattle-based Monolith Productions (the talent behind successful movie tie-ins like *TRON 2.0* and *Alien Vs Predator*), *The Matrix Online* picks up the pieces left behind by the disappointing conclusion of the movie trilogy and attempts to turn them into a hugely successful MMORPG – and it's a task that could well be within its grasp. Despite being set after the trilogy, the game looks to be taking the concept of the *Matrix* back to the roots of the original film, due to the removal of the more overly fantastical elements that seemed out of place even in a fantasy sci-fi context.

What's more, Monolith's attempts to create a sprawling urban environment packed with enough essence of the licence without losing traditional MMORPG values could be enough to tip the balance in its favour. It's these tried-and-tested values that should help *The Matrix Online* become so much more than just a brain-numbing brawl-'em-up on wires. Granted, combat is a huge part of the game but thanks to the title's premise, there's enough scope for character development and a deeper game experience than just learning kung-fu.

Set against the backdrop of an uneasy truce between Zion and the Machines, how

you go about developing your character is as important as in any MMORPG. While you might be playing the part of a recent escapee of the *Matrix*, that doesn't necessarily mean your loyalty should lie with the humans. The game's main mission structure promises to encompass every eventuality, with tasks being offered by Zion, the Machines and other organisations (no doubt the Merovingian will rear his ugly head again) so making the decision of who to get involved with isn't quite as obvious as you might think. As you enhance your character and get more recognition among your fellow escapees, you'll be able to form groups (for completing certain tougher missions), lead your own Hovercraft crew and even create your own political faction if becoming the next Morpheus takes your fancy.

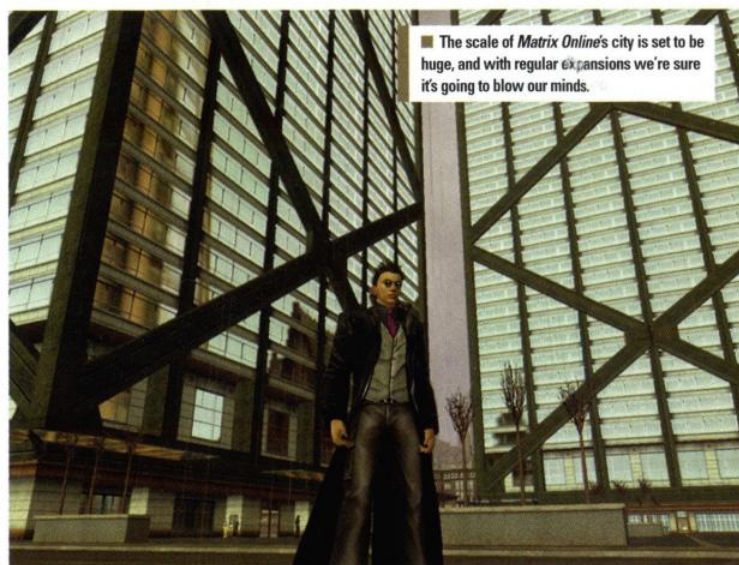
DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: WBIE
DEVELOPER: Monolith
RELEASE: Q4 '04
GENRE: MMORPG
PLAYERS: Massively Multiplayer

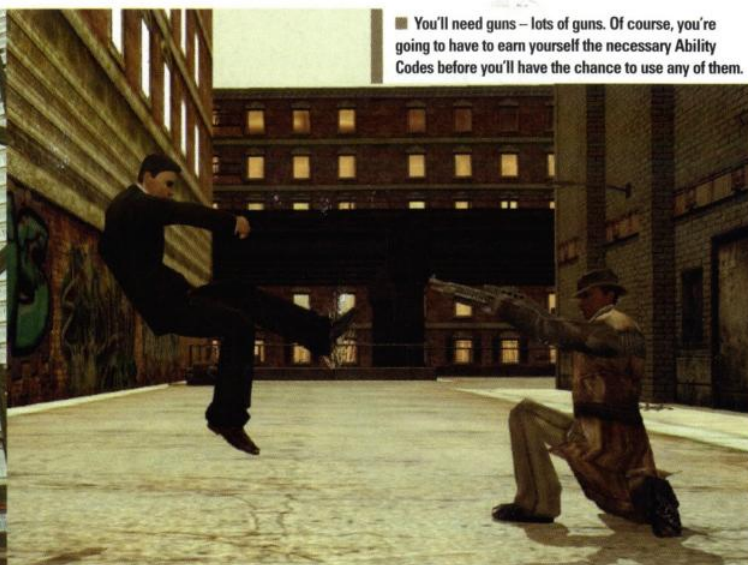
■ Finally, the game that could do the concept of *The Matrix* justice – if it brings something new to the MMORPG genre, that is.

TIME FOR A LOCK-IN

To say that MMORPG combat isn't exactly riveting would be a bit of an understatement, so Monolith has worked hard to maintain the fast-paced action of *The Matrix* without making things too complex. The result is a process called Interlock – a huge system of choreographed animations created in pairs that flow together seamlessly and allow characters to fight against one another in intricate combat sequences, even using complex combos and Bullet Time moves with relative ease. Players choose between speed, power and defence for each move, all in real-time rather than in a turn-based fashion, which are then played out on-screen according to each character's current list of available moves and skills. Here's hoping it works as well as it sounds it will...



■ The scale of *Matrix Online*'s city is set to be huge, and with regular expansions we're sure it's going to blow our minds.



■ You'll need guns – lots of guns. Of course, you're going to have to earn yourself the necessary Ability Codes before you'll have the chance to use any of them.

"MANY OF THE IDEAS SOUND IMPRESSIVE, THOUGH IT'S NOT KNOWN HOW WELL THEY WILL WORK TOGETHER"

THE MATRIX ONLINE CONT.

"THERE'S CERTAINLY A FOCUS ON THE ACTION SIDE OF THINGS BUT, THANKFULLY, THIS ISN'T THE ONLY THING THAT THE GAME HAS GOING FOR IT"

▷ As well as this extensive and almost game-altering effect that you can have on The Matrix depending on how you play, developing your character has a much more immediate range of influences. For example, it can dictate how you'll need to approach certain situations depending on which Ability Tree you follow. Split into three major categories (with many sub-categories within), the Ability Trees manage your character's skills and allow you to modify your game experience accordingly, much like the Biomod system in *Deus Ex: Invisible War*. For example, a player using Soldier abilities will be able to learn many styles of martial arts, as well as use firearms like rifles and machine-guns, which in turn lead to more specialist moves like performing cartwheels while shooting and incorporating walls into attack combos.

If, however, you went down the Hacker route, then your abilities would be tailored towards direct manipulation of The Matrix's code; using viral programs to disrupt an enemy or applying virtual upgrades to enhance your character's attributes. Not surprisingly, players are limited to how many abilities they can use at once and some of the more advanced skills require other abilities to be 'loaded' into your character before you can use them. Thankfully, Ability Code can be swapped in and out (according to how you want to progress) and traded with other players.

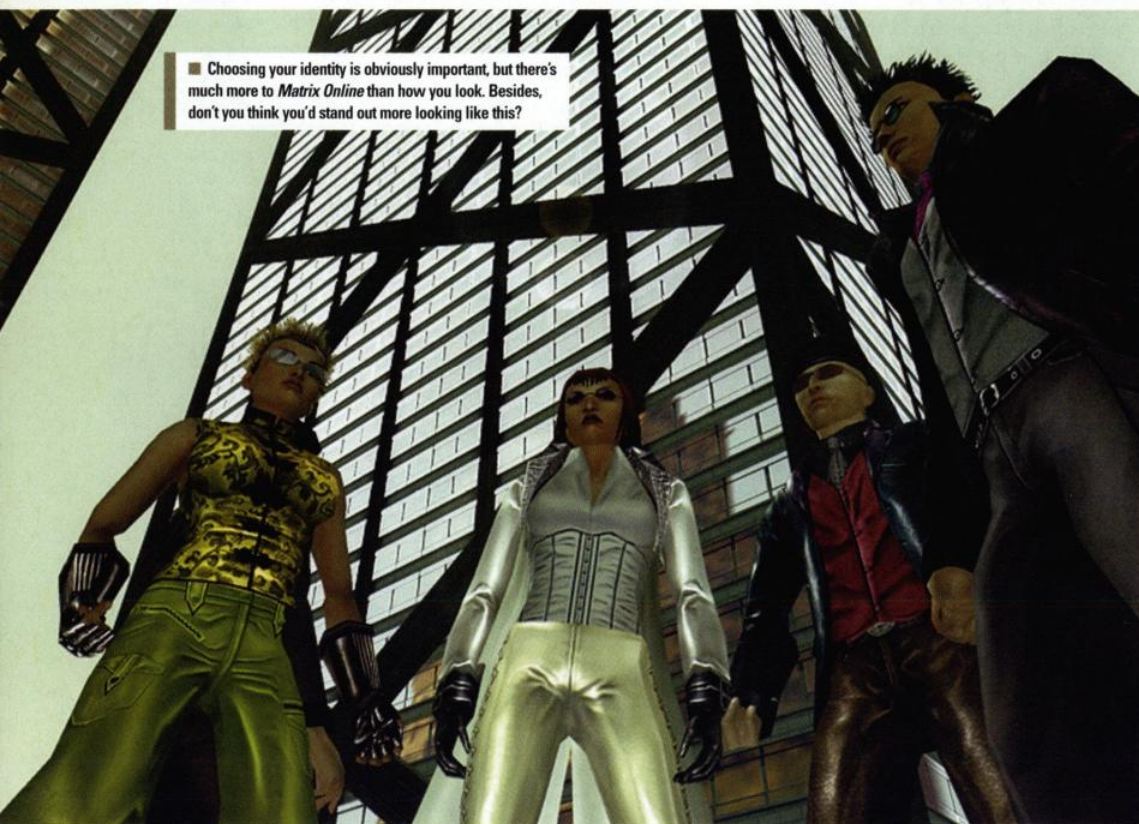
But while using specific Ability Code is a key part of progression in *The Matrix Online*, there are plenty of other ways to make yourself useful in the game world. Money, for instance, is useless in The Matrix and if you want to live the easy life

you'll be far better off finding decent sources of Information. Finding hidden Data Nodes will allow you to tap into the source of The Matrix itself, which in turn allows you to gather Information that can be traded with other players. The larger the Node, the 'richer' you'll become – although finding such an output not only pits you against your fellow players, but also against the Agents who still act as the guardians of the Matrix and will do anything to stop thieves. And if you think you can outfight an Agent, you'd better be prepared...

All this sounds intriguing and we've got high hopes that Monolith will be able to create the most enjoyable *Matrix*-based experience yet (not that that would be difficult). However, there's also the argument that all Monolith has done so far is adapt everything we understand about MMORPGs and use the philosophy of *The Matrix* to give it a glossy paintjob. With monthly charges already confirmed, the lure of being able to be part of The Matrix isn't quite enough to warrant regular payments. And then there's the involvement of the Wachowski brothers themselves. With the pair having an active involvement in the development of the game's storyline, there's always a chance that *The Matrix Online* might have a few too many Architect-style moments for its own good...



■ Choosing your identity is obviously important, but there's much more to *Matrix Online* than how you look. Besides, don't you think you'd stand out more looking like this?



ZION VS ZION

The majority of today's MMORPGs focus solely on co-operation in order to succeed, which is nice if you want to make friends but not all that stimulating when you're hacking the head off a computer-controlled dragon. *The Matrix Online*, however, brings in the grand possibility of 'player versus player' confrontations that may be necessary depending on the circumstances – for instance, if you and a rival both discover the same Data Node and need a more physical means of deciding who gets to tap it. Naturally, the majority of the more standard missions will offer their own source of AI-controlled enemies to duel with, but with all those martial arts on offer and so many real people to use them on... Who could resist?



DESIGNER PROFILE

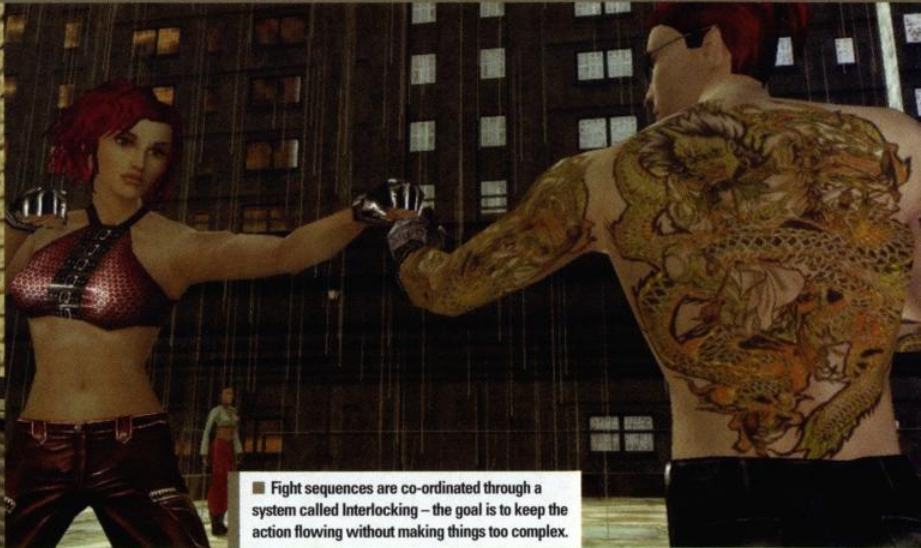
■ As MMP creative director at Monolith and with over eight years of experience with massively multiplayer games, Toby Ragaini is perfectly suited to be lead designer on *Matrix Online*. He also has a BA in molecular biology and worked as a member of a genetic research team before entering the games industry.

HISTORY

■ ASHERON'S CALL 1999 [PC]



■ Just because you're fighting for the greater good, that doesn't mean you have to play nice with other people.



■ Fight sequences are co-ordinated through a system called Interlocking – the goal is to keep the action flowing without making things too complex.



**"OUR GOAL IS TO CREATE A
MULTIPLAYER ONLINE GAME
THAT REFLECTS THE TRILOGY'S
HIGHLY STYLISED STORYTELLING
AND INNOVATIVE ACTION"**

JOEL SILVER, PRODUCER, THE MATRIX TRILOGY

■ Monolith's aim with *Matrix Online* is to create an online version of the movie – something that seems more than a little ambitious.

PREVIEW | METAL GEAR SOLID 3: SNAKE EATER | PLAYSTATION2

METAL GEAR SOLID 3: SNAKE EATER

"THIS PUSHES BACK THE
AESTHETIC BOUNDARIES THAT
HAVE ELEVATED THE METAL
GEAR SERIES ABOVE ITS
CONTEMPORARIES"

KONAMI PRESS RELEASE

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

ALL THE ACTION, BUT TAKE AWAY THE BLOODSHED



RAMBO



OPERATION WOLF



SPLINTER CELL



MGS3

■ Disguising yourself in a Fire
suit in the middle of a forest isn't
a particularly good move.

FIRE
NO PAINT

METAL GEAR SOLID 3: SNAKE EATER

PLAYSTATION2



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Konami has been on the cutting edge of videogame development as long as there have been games, and is responsible for influential titles from *Castlevania* on the NES to *Silent Hill* on the PSone to the current *Pro Evo* series on PS2. The developer has also been mainly responsible for the emergence of peripheral-led gaming, with its Bemani range of dance and music titles.

HISTORY

- CY GIRLS 2004 [PS2]
- MGS2: SONS OF LIBERTY 2001 [PS2]
- METAL GEAR SOLID 1997 [PSone]



DETAILS

FORMAT:

PlayStation2

ORIGIN: Japan

PUBLISHER: Konami

DEVELOPER:

In-house

RELEASE: Q4 '04

(US: April '04)

GENRE:

Action Stealth

PLAYERS: 1

■ After army bases and oil rigs, Hideo Kojima takes Solid Snake into the jungle for a Sixties-based game of hide-and-seek with the enemy.

DON'T FORGET YOUR PORTABLE JUNGLE WARDROBE

It's scary in this industry how quickly the ground-breaking becomes familiar and, inevitably, mundane. Sequels are churned out with little innovation or sense of consumer value. So after the misstep of *Sons Of Liberty*, Konami is investing a great deal of time and energy into making Solid Snake's next appearance something more than a typical action licence sequel.

Of course, it's also worth noting that it's now the best part of a decade since Hideo Kojima unleashed the brilliant *Metal Gear Solid* upon the PlayStation – and that Konami is still only preparing Snake's third 3D outing when other titles have seen up to seven sequels. So out goes the twisty-turny pretentiousness of *MGS2*, and in comes a Sixties jungle setting, complete with booby traps, living wildlife and trees to climb. Since last year's E3, there has been a steady flow of new features announced for the title, including animal eating, hanging from overhead boughs and dislodging wasps'

nesting onto unsuspecting enemies – and, as these new screenshots demonstrate, Kojima-san has also implemented a camouflage system, which we recently saw in action at Konami HQ.

Kojima-san's presentation (as it was) consisted of a Powerpoint display and a six-minute camouflage tutorial video, and ably demonstrated the simplicity of the system and its ease of use. Based around a percentage camouflage index (with 100 per cent equating to complete concealment), Snake's basic level of visibility is dictated by his posture, with his clothing and face paint raising or lowering the index score. There are seven fabric patterns from which to choose, with more promised as available for download after the game's release.

Standing up will give you 45 per cent camouflage (with crouching offering 60 per cent and lying flat 80 per cent), though movement will obviously lower this score, with even slow movement carrying an 80 per cent chance of being seen, and running akin to donning ankle-bells and a Day-Glo vest. The effectiveness of clothing depends on the environment, and each outfit corresponds to a terrain: black kit is good against earth or shadow; 'tree bark' allows chameleonic back-to-tree hiding; 'leaf'

relates to foliage or fallen leaves; 'olive drab' marries with moss and some reeds; and 'tiger stripe' hides your hero in the grass. The last two outfits ('fire' and 'snow') are weather-, rather than environment-, specific, suggesting that the finished game will span a range of locations.

Intriguingly, the video never featured Snake engaging in combat; the emphasis was purely on personifying the military ghost and becoming one with the undergrowth. The physical implementation of the disguise element looked extremely effective too, with enemy AI routines proving logical, and leading to many tense instances of guards searching the brush as Snake stood right in front of them. Of course, the effect will be laughable if we're unable to believe Snake is really hidden, but we were pleased to discover that not only will a 100 per cent index hide him from enemies, but it actually becomes something of a challenge to see him on-screen, despite having just positioned him.

We'll have an opportunity to see exactly how all the new elements will hold together at E3. However, it so far seems unlikely that Snake's exploits will disappoint to the degree Raiden's did last time.



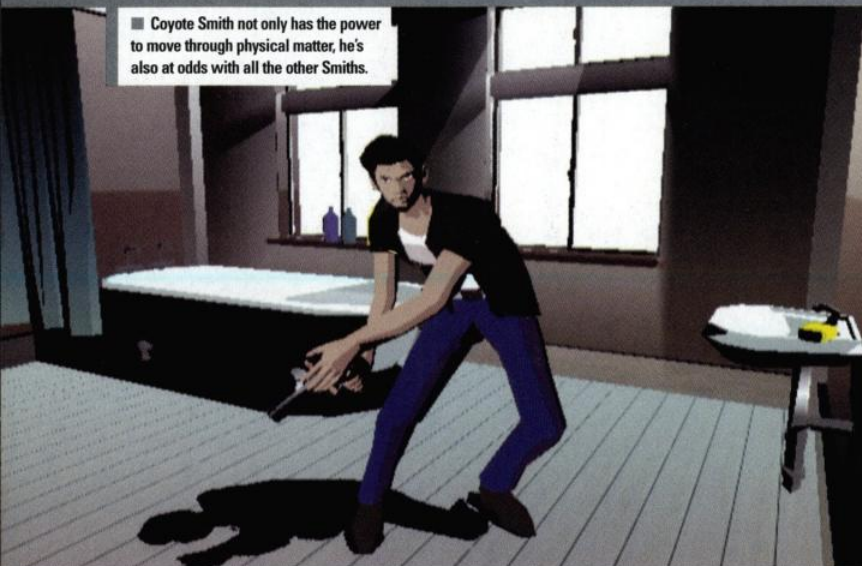
YOU AIN'T SEEN ME, RIGHT?

Snake's camouflage sets can be used in ways you may not expect. So snow camouflage, while useless against most surfaces, offers a small degree of cover when submerged neck-deep in water. And while wearing a tiger-striped ensemble in a forest will offer less protection than the leaf pattern, it's better than the fire design. From early footage, black looks to be a good all-purpose camo set, but only if you're prepared to skulk in the shadows and not engage the enemy. However, it is possible in moments of extreme conspicuousness for your camouflage index to drop below zero – standing around in black will be just as useless as a red suit in a snowy scene.

"FROM WHAT WE'VE SEEN, IT SEEMS UNLIKELY THAT SNAKE'S EXPLOITS WILL DISAPPOINT TO THE DEGREE RAIDEN'S DID LAST TIME"

KILLER 7

■ Coyote Smith not only has the power to move through physical matter, he's also at odds with all the other Smiths.



■ Take down a Heaven's Smile-possessed human and they'll erupt in a shower of blood. Lovely...



THREE MAY BE THE MAGIC NUMBER, BUT WE LIKE THE SOUND OF SEVEN

Does the word 'exclusive' mean anything nowadays? Once upon a time, the likes of *Killer 7*, *Resident Evil 4*, *PN.03* and *Viewtiful Joe* were all GameCube exclusives, and because of this, many Nintendo owners felt a warm, fuzzy glow inside. Now, though, it appears that Capcom has had a change of heart, as *Killer 7* has defected to the PS2. Don't get us wrong, we're more than happy that Capcom's unique shooter will be reaching a larger audience (it's still being released on the Cube), but you have to wonder about the stability of Capcom's other so-called exclusives. Still, gripes aside, information is continuing to trickle out of Capcom's seemingly watertight Japanese offices and it appears that there's more to *Killer 7* than meets the eye.

Using both a first- and third-person perspective, Capcom's latest title places you in the wheelchair-bound frame of master assassin Harman Smith. Despite looking like a regular pensioner who's just returned from a day out, Smith's ability to

take over seven distinct personalities means he's not a man to be trifled with. His alter egos range in age and ability from a 14-year-old child with exceptional hearing to a masked 38-year-old whose weapons of choice are two huge grenade launchers. All seven distinct personalities must be exploited if you wish to unravel *Killer 7*'s sci-fi-esque plot.

With global terrorism reaching critical levels, the whole world has joined forces in order to restore peace. Numerous anti-terrorist organisations are formed, with governments even going so far as to halt all air and land travel for two years in a bid to bring a stop to crazed madman Kun Lan. Thanks to a virus known as Heaven's Smile, Lan is able to turn a person into a gibbering, psychotic shadow of their former selves by simply looking at them. Unsurprisingly, not only is Lan never invited to cocktail parties, he's also caught the attention of Smith, who's been hired to stop the psychopath once and for all.

While the majority of *Killer 7*'s gameplay seems to be heavily rooted in blowing away as many adversaries as possible, it's been revealed that character interaction will also play an important part in the game. Capcom has said that each of Smith's personalities' individual skills will feature heavily, although it's reluctant to explain exactly how these will work within the main game. What we do know is that creatures affected by Heaven's Smile come equipped with a Predator-like cloaking device which

enables them to initially escape detection. Once you've thoroughly scanned a screen and locked onto a foe, a single shot causes the device to fail, enabling you to fill them with as much hot lead as possible. To ensure that the game doesn't suffer from *Virtua Cop* syndrome (the same guys appearing in the same places) each new game will have your enemies appearing in different places, meaning that no two games should ever play the same.

Of course, it would be easy to say that for all its stylised and moody looks *Killer 7* could turn out to be little more than a dramatic case of style over substance. Nevertheless, as its Japanese release date draws closer we're becoming more intrigued with this unique-looking game. So far, every title we've seen from Production Studio 4 has proved to be something special. Hopefully, *Killer 7* will continue this tradition.



WHAT THE HELL'S GOING ON?

While it's not been revealed exactly how Harman has control over the seven other Smiths, we do know that each Smith is aware that they are somehow linked to Harman (although they don't realise that Harman is somehow controlling all of them). Needless to say, we're expecting *Killer 7*'s storyline to become more convoluted than an episode of *The X-Files* (though hopefully with slightly better acting). Playing *Killer 7* will reveal the true mechanics behind Harman's abilities, but for the moment, our bets are on some form of schizophrenia – à la James Mangold's *Identity*. The various Smiths may have been shown interacting with each other at various stages of the game, but that's not to say they've not all been created from the mind of one warped individual.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2,

GameCube

ORIGIN: Japan

PUBLISHER:

Capcom

DEVELOPER:

In-House

RELEASE: TBC '04

GENRE: Adventure

PLAYERS: 1

■ Originally one of the famous five from Production Studio 4, *Killer 7* looks set to be the studio's most original title yet.

"SOME MIGHT BAULK AT ITS CEL-SHADING, BUT KILLER 7 LOOKS LIKE ANOTHER UNIQUE FEATHER IN CAPCOM'S CAPACIOUS HAT"

KILLER 7

PLAYSTATION2/MULTIFORMAT



DEVELOPER PROFILE

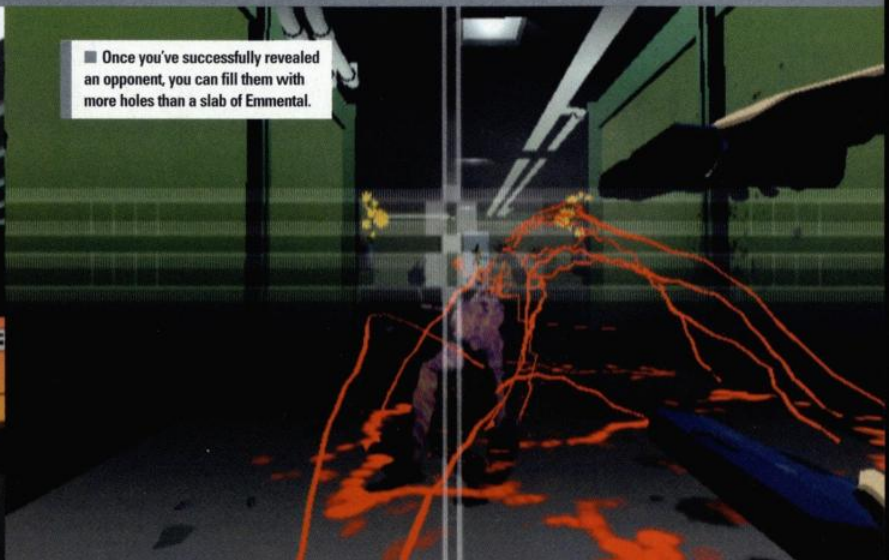
■ Production Studio 4 was formed in 2002 under the leadership of *Resident Evil*'s creator Shinji Mikami. Currently overseen by Noritaka Funamizu, its most well-known title is *Viewtiful Joe*, although we're expecting it to be usurped by the impressive-looking *Resident Evil 4*.

HISTORY

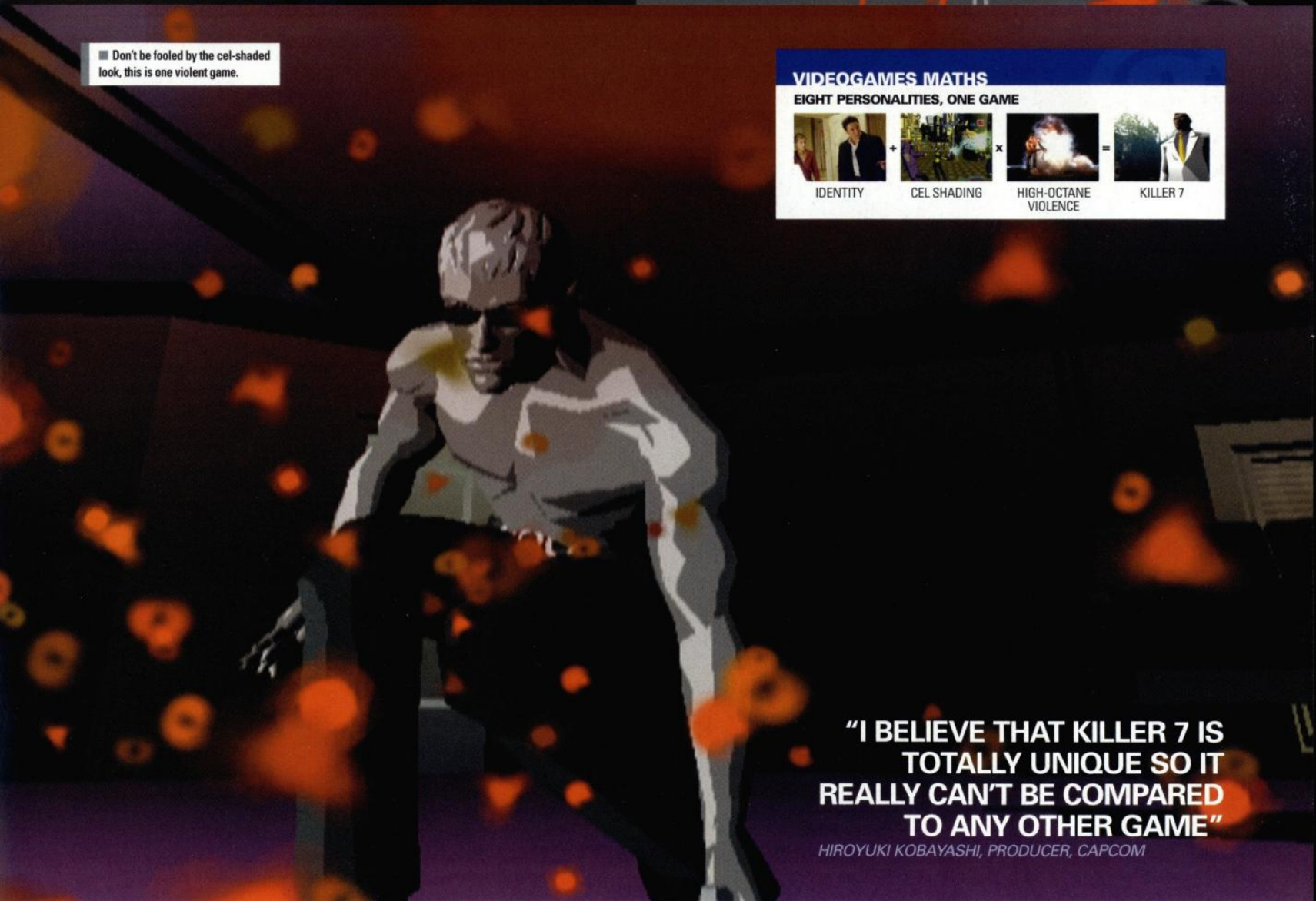
- VIEWTIFUL JOE 2003 [GameCube]
- DEVIL MAY CRY 2001 [PlayStation2]
- DINO CRISIS 2000 [Dreamcast]



■ Dan is just one of the eight Smiths. He comes with the handy ability to change bullet trajectories.



■ Once you've successfully revealed an opponent, you can fill them with more holes than a slab of Emmental.



■ Don't be fooled by the cel-shaded look, this is one violent game.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

EIGHT PERSONALITIES, ONE GAME



IDENTITY



CEL SHADING



HIGH-OCTANE
VIOLENCE

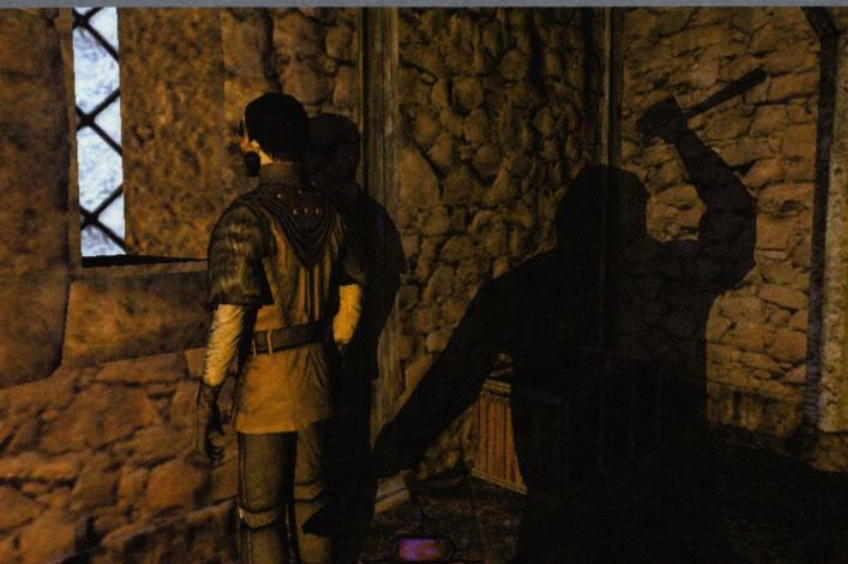


KILLER 7

"I BELIEVE THAT KILLER 7 IS
TOTALLY UNIQUE SO IT
REALLY CAN'T BE COMPARED
TO ANY OTHER GAME"

HIROYUKI KOBAYASHI, PRODUCER, CAPCOM

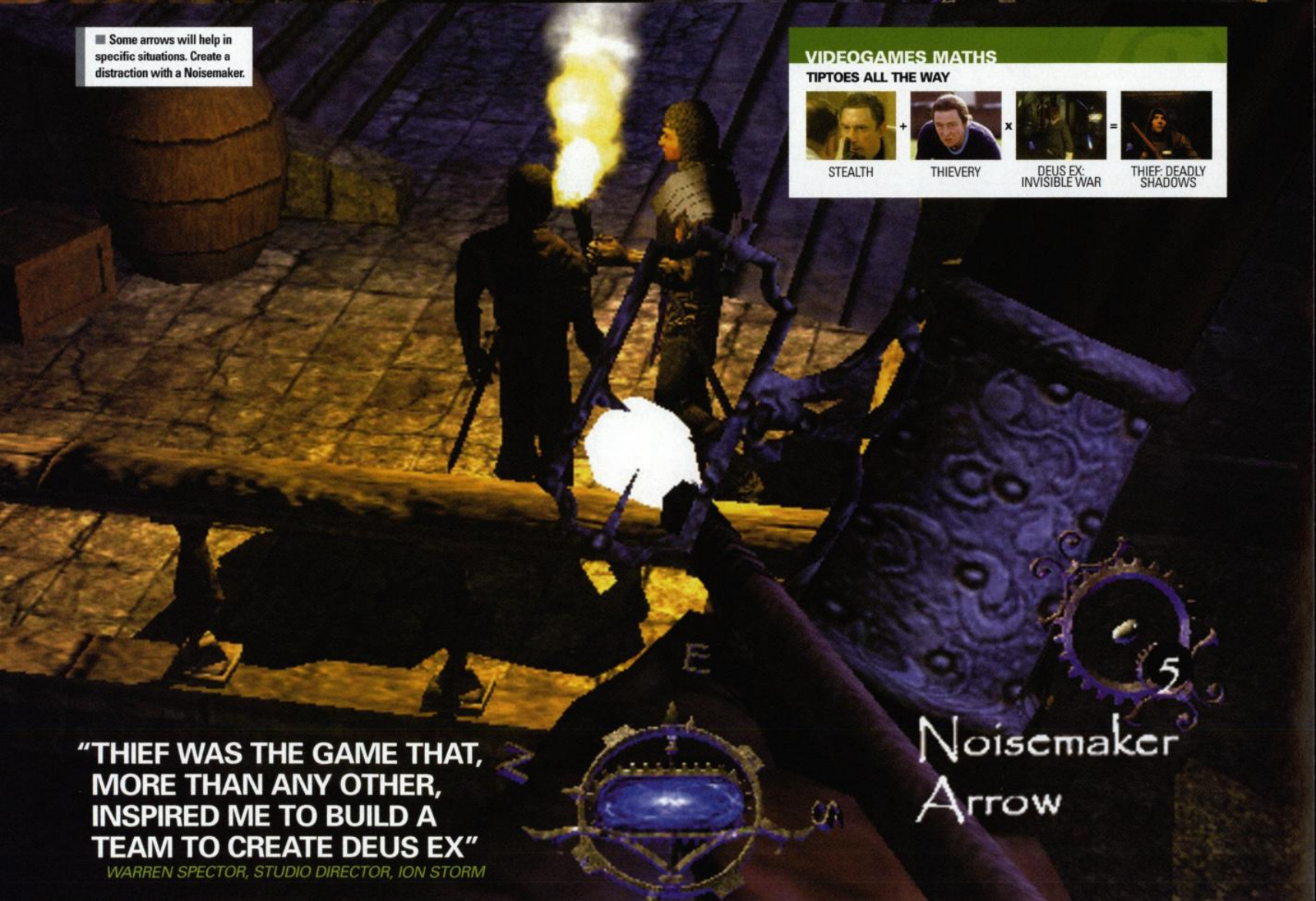
THIEF: DEADLY SHADOWS



■ Engaging in combat is not a good idea, so get around quietly.



■ Some arrows will help in specific situations. Create a distraction with a Noisemaker.



VIDEOGAMES MATHS

TIPTOES ALL THE WAY



STEALTH



THIEVERY



DEUS EX:
INVISIBLE WAR



THIEF: DEADLY
SHADOWS

**"THIEF WAS THE GAME THAT,
MORE THAN ANY OTHER,
INSPIRED ME TO BUILD A
TEAM TO CREATE DEUS EX"**

WARREN SPECTOR, STUDIO DIRECTOR, ION STORM

Noisemaker
Arrow

THIEF: DEADLY SHADOWS

XBOX/MULTIFORMAT



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ After working on several dice-based RPGs at Steve Jackson Games and TSR, Warren Spector joined the videogame industry in 1989 with Origin Systems. His time at Ion Storm began in 1997, and in 2000 he cemented his place in gaming's hall of fame with genre-defying masterpiece *Deus Ex*.

HISTORY

- **DEUS EX: INVISIBLE WAR** 2004 [Xbox, PC]
- **DEUS EX 2000** [PC]
- **SYSTEM SHOCK** 1994 [PC, Mac]

CAN ION STORM'S 'OTHER' GAME STEAL THE LIMELIGHT FROM DEUS EX?

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox, PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Eidos
DEVELOPER: Ion Storm
RELEASE: Q3 '04
GENRE: Stealth Action
PLAYERS: 1

■ The original stealth action game gets a new lease of life courtesy of Ion Storm's impressive *Invisible War* engine.

■ After the unprecedented success of stealth-'em-up series such as *Hitman*, *Tenchu* and *Splinter Cell*, the gaming world seems to have become obsessed with skilfully avoiding conflict, rather than the trigger-happy mentality of old. Although there's still plenty of room for those games that uphold the time-honoured art of dashing headlong at a group of enemies in a button-tapping frenzy, today's stealth-conscious gamer has been conditioned to search for a more calculated solution. Yet while the aforementioned titles are frequently credited with defining this genre, PC gamers will tell you it was the original *Thief* game that pioneered the whole stealth-over-butchery concept back in 1998.

Now the ground-breaking series is poised to take centre stage once more with its suitably lavish third instalment and, thanks to the interest generated by its more recent

big-name peers, a far larger audience should be willing sit up and listen this time. Industry legend Warren Spector readily points to *Thief: The Dark Project* as being his chief inspiration in creating the great *Deus Ex*, yet in an ironic twist of fate the cutting-edge technology and celebrated gameplay elements from *Deus Ex: Invisible War* are now being drawn upon to bring the *Thief* universe to life more vividly than ever.

From the outset it's strikingly obvious that the impressive dynamic lighting, advanced Havok physics and richly mapped textures are the work of an enhanced *DE:IW* engine, but venturing beneath the surface reveals just how many aspects of Ion Storm's skilfully woven sci-fi epic have found their way into *Thief: Deadly Shadows*. But despite such strong evidence of *DE:IW*'s influence being used to wonderfully flesh out the game world, fans will be pleased to learn this is definitely a *Thief* game through and through.

Master thief Garrett returns in the title role, slinking in and out of the shadows. The traditional mission-based structure has been interspersed with *Deus Ex*-style city roaming, where players are invited to freely explore the living medieval environments to their heart's content and take full advantage of any opportunities they stumble upon to make a fast buck. Whether turning your light-fingered talents to a key story-based mission or incidental

spot of entrepreneurial larceny, there will always be a rich platter of means by which your prize may be reached.

As ever, head-on combat is strongly discouraged with players being forced to engage their cunning and patience to make it past the legions of guards undetected. Advanced AI is obviously key to the whole stealth concept, and Ion Storm is striving to perfect some of the most convincing NPC behaviour to date, furnishing them with a vast repertoire of phrases to verbally illustrate their various states of alertness. Helpfully, an all-new third-person viewpoint gives players greater appreciation of Garrett's level of concealment, while fans of the familiar first-person perspective are similarly treated to increased 'body awareness' to avoid any inadvertent scenery clattering.

By embellishing the unique strengths of the *Thief* series with those ingredients that gave the *DE:IW* universe such engrossing depth and vitality, *Deadly Shadows* looks certain to bring Garrett the widespread recognition he deserves.



YOU AIN'T SEEN ME, RIGHT?

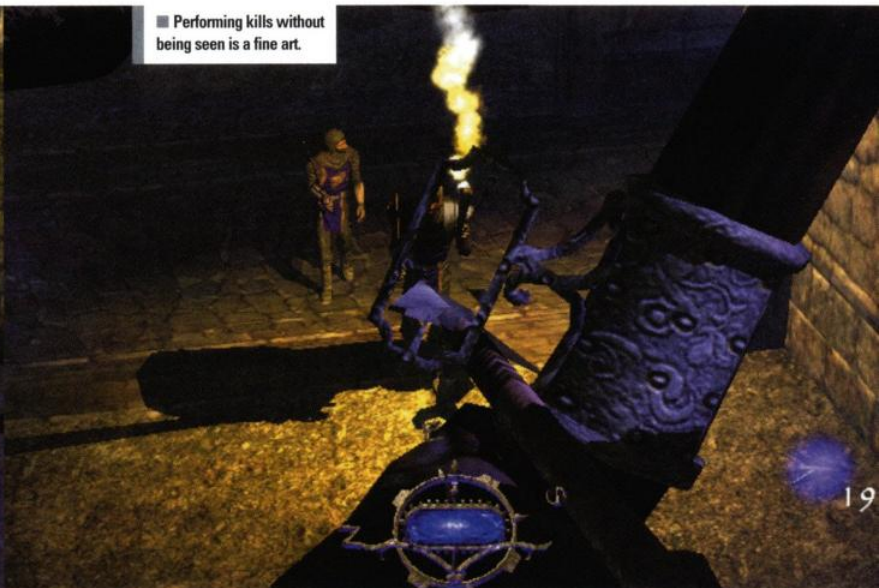
Garrett's tool kit leaves players at quite a disadvantage in toe-to-toe combat, yet provides everything a medieval master of stealth would need to keep contact with his foes to a minimum. A pair of Wall-Scaling Gloves ensures Garrett's progress isn't restricted to ground level, while his Blackjack Truncheon and Assassin's Blade inflict a swift demise on unsuspecting prey. Most valuable of all is his versatile Bow, which not only provides an effective sniping weapon but also creates a number of other tactical possibilities. Water Arrows, for instance, can be used to snuff out torches and create more shadows to hide in – or even to wash away the telltale bloodstains left by your victims.

"ION STORM IS STRIVING TO PERFECT THE MOST CONVINCING NPC BEHAVIOUR YET"

■ Everyone you meet (and kill) will have top-notch AI.



■ Performing kills without being seen is a fine art.



STAR OCEAN: TILL THE END OF TIME

DETAILS

FORMAT:

PlayStation2

ORIGIN: Japan

PUBLISHER:

Square Enix

DEVELOPER:

tri-Ace

RELEASE: TBC

(Japan: Out Now)

GENRE: RPG

PLAYERS: 1

■ Set almost a thousand years in the future, this latest *Star Ocean* title is set to fill the gap left in the PAL market by a seemingly forgotten *Xenosaga*.

YOUR GREAT-GREAT-GREAT-GRANDDAUGHTER IS PRETTY FINE...

■ **Never let it be said that Square Enix rushes its games out.** The PAL market is still waiting for *Final Fantasy XI*, *Chrono Trigger* and *Parasite Eve* to name but a few, and there's always a long enough gap between its key titles to build anticipation to an uncontrollable level. But now, for whatever reason, much of Square Enix's less well-known catalogue is being shipped out of Japan. And as the usual suspects come out with the same old content time and time again, it's to these underdogs that we must look for more imaginative or original adventuring.

The first piece of good news comes by way of the fact that the localised version of *Star Ocean* will most likely be based on the *Director's Cut* edition of the game that was

recently unleashed upon Japan. This would mean being packaged on two discs in order to reincorporate features left out due to space restrictions. These include new playable characters, dungeons and an entire new mode of play, offering versus battle action for two players. *Star Ocean* is very proud of its cinematic style – not in a *Xenosaga* 'save mid-cut-scene' passive kind of way (well, not quite) but through clever direction and use of every element in harmony to really immerse the player in the game's vision of the future.

The game itself is set way into the future (772 SD more specifically – 'Space Date' starting from man's first interstellar trip in the late 21st Century), and from what seems like quite a promising premise it soon ends up tackling the same old RPG themes. Not that there's anything wrong with this – an old topic covered well is far preferable to a convoluted take on difficult new subject matter. Angst-ridden teen lead Fate Linegod is the centre of attention, getting separated from everything he knows to be true as the game begins and having to partake in a galaxy-trawling quest to win it all back.

We're promised improvements to the more popular features of the series and even to the fundamental elements – the

battle system, for one, has undergone major renovation. In what is basically a real-time system, you take full control of one of the three participants (with the welcome option to switch mid-battle) while the computer governs the other two. Augmentations have also been made within the Item Creation and Personal Action systems, two features that not only helped the second game stand clear of the pack but also two of the most popular elements among the series' fans. As such, the extra depth and scope should please most players, assuming, that is, that things aren't taken to such a degree that they get out of hand or just too daunting.

We're really hoping that we'll see an Australian release of *Till The End Of Time*. Delayed in the US, it's slated for an August release in Europe. It's performance there may well determine its fate here; while we're used to seeing the likes of *Final Fantasy* top the charts, the outside bets are seldom seen on shelves, let alone in sales listings. If nothing else, we hope this latest epic fares better than fallen warriors such as *Breath Of Fire: Dragon Quarter* and *Unlimited SaGa*. Surely the market hasn't become so predictable as to knock out all bar the most established RPG franchises?

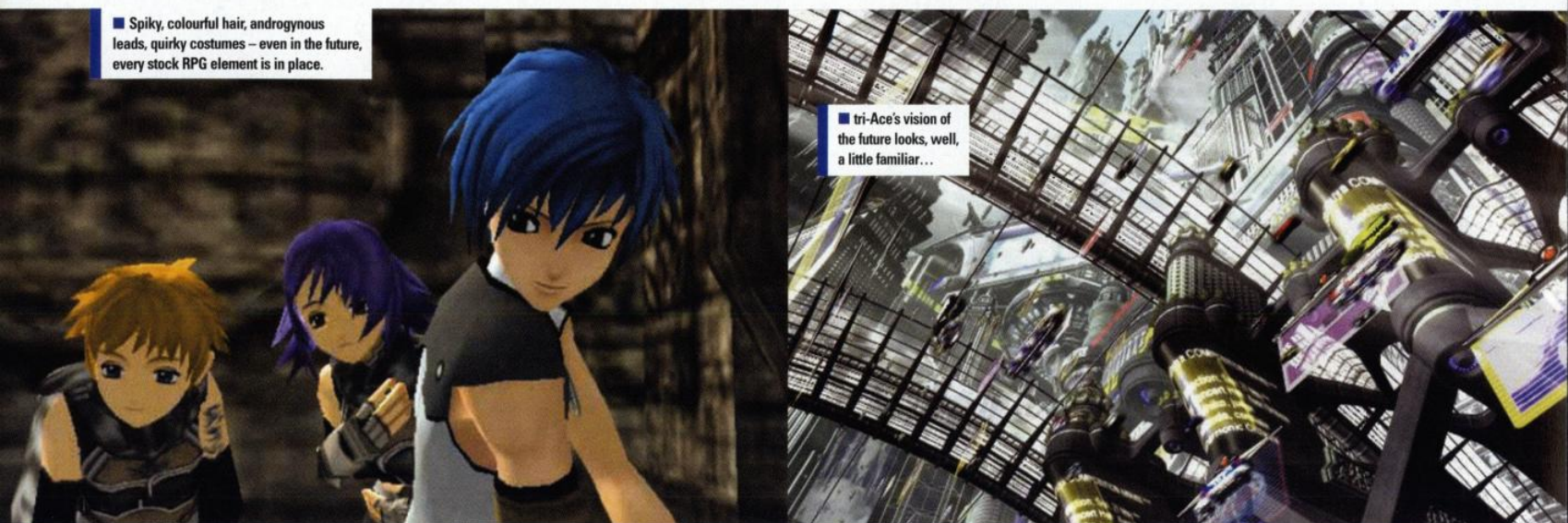
A DESIGN FOR LIFE

Going on past performances, *Till The End Of Time* could be the most appropriate gaming sub-head in years. You see, the second game in the series boasted 86 endings depending on how you played through it, so if you did want to see every finale you'd be looking at putting aside about a year of your life. Cue the arrival of this third title, promising bigger and better things in just about every area, so we have to assume that *Till The End Of Time* plans to suck away even more of our precious lives. There's been no confirmation of the number of potential climaxes to this tale, but series rules dictate that playing through once will hardly give a fair impression of events.

"SURELY THE MARKET HASN'T BECOME SO PREDICTABLE AS TO KNOCK OUT ALL BAR THE MOST ESTABLISHED RPG FRANCHISES?"

■ Spiky, colourful hair, androgynous leads, quirky costumes – even in the future, every stock RPG element is in place.

■ tri-Ace's vision of the future looks, well, a little familiar...



STAR OCEAN: TILL THE END OF TIME

PLAYSTATION2



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Founded in 1995, tri-Ace is a fully independent developer despite close ties with Square Enix that may imply otherwise. Famed for its RPG output, the firm has won many fans with a steady flow of consistently good titles and currently employs a staff of nearly a hundred at its Tokyo offices.

HISTORY

- VALKYRIE PROFILE 2000 [PSone]
- STAR OCEAN: THE SECOND STORY 1999 [PSone]
- STAR OCEAN 1996 [SNES]



■ While basic visuals are rather simple, lighting and effects help to increase the graphical allure.



Range **SHORT**

ヴァーティカル・エアレイド SPECIAL ATTACK

"STAR OCEAN LIVES UP TO ITS REPUTATION AS AN ASTOUNDING VISUAL CINEMATIC EXPERIENCE"

TRI-ACE PRESS RELEASE



VIDEOGAMES MATHS

DIVING BENEATH THE SURFACE OF STAR OCEAN



XENOSAGA



GRANDIA



VAGRANT STORY



STAR OCEAN: TTEOT

RESIDENT EVIL 4

**"WITH A FRESH LOOK AND
REDESIGNED CONCEPTS,
RESIDENT EVIL 4 PRESENTS
A FEAR MORE REAL THAN
EVER BEFORE"**

CAPCOM PRESS RELEASE

■ Basic enemies, environments and camera perspectives may have changed, but bosses remain as menacing as ever.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

NAUSEATINGLY GORGEOUS CARNAGE



CODE: VERONICA



BEAUTY



BEASTS



RESIDENT EVIL 4

■ The Action button lets you perform a range of context-sensitive acts to stem the tide of enemies.

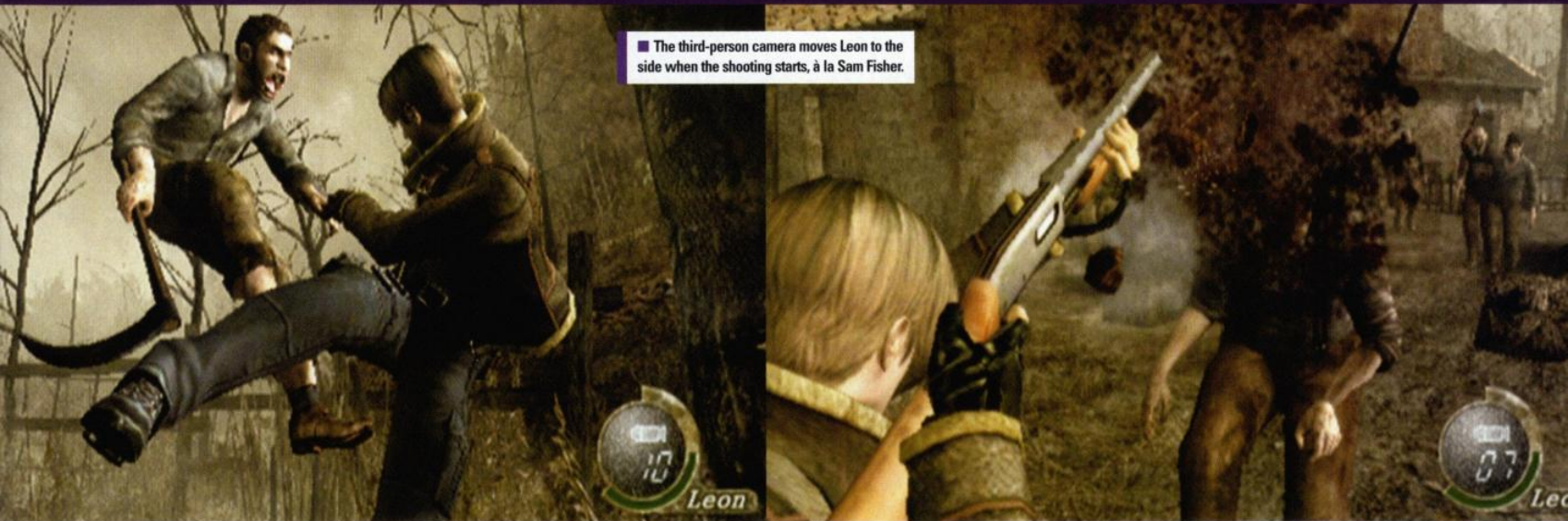


SERIES PROFILE

■ For many, the survival horror genre was born in 1996 when Capcom unleashed its zombie-laden *Resident Evil* thrill-fest to rapturous applause from PSone gamers. Despite facing a prestigious line-up of competitors over the years, the series continues to rank among the most highly regarded in its field.

HISTORY

- **RESIDENT EVIL ZERO** 2003 [GameCube]
- **RESIDENT EVIL 2** 1998 [PSone]
- **RESIDENT EVIL** 1996 [PSone]



CAN CAPCOM TAKE UP RESIDENCE AT THE GENRE'S HELM ONCE AGAIN?

DETAILS

FORMAT: GameCube
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Capcom
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: September '04
GENRE: Survival Horror
PLAYERS: 1

■ Capcom looks to revolutionise the *Resident Evil* series with a dynamic 3D camera and some menacingly realistic visuals.

■ Considering the calibre of the exclusive titles adorning the GameCube's software portfolio it's a wonder Nintendo's machine has struggled to win over many a gamer. But while big hitters *Metroid Prime*, *Zelda: The Wind Waker* and the visually sublime *Resident Evil Zero* have no doubt lent a massive helping hand to the console's sales figures, Capcom's latest Cube-only project could end up shifting more little purple boxes than anything else to date. The hype surrounding *Resident Evil 4* has been steadily building for more three years now and, although the finished product still isn't set to appear until September this year, anticipation levels are climbing fast thanks to the latest glimpses Capcom has given the world of its impending masterpiece in action.

WHAT'S AI GOT TO DO WITH IT?

As well as looking more human, the average *RE4* bad guy is also blessed with a good deal more intelligence than your typical mindless zombie. For the first time players will have to contend with enemies doing much more than staggering blindly towards your waiting shotgun barrel. Swarms of deranged villagers will demonstrate self-preservation instincts and even work together to lure you into ambushes. Thankfully, you'll have a couple of new features working in your favour too. Location-specific damage means a shrewdly placed shot to the leg will slow down advancing foes, while a series of context-sensitive special actions let you gain the upper hand in even more style.

For many fans of the genre, Konami's chilling *Silent Hill* series has, in recent years, stolen a hefty piece of the limelight from the once definitive *Resi* franchise, but Capcom is pulling out all the stops to win back its crown when the giants of survival horror go head to head yet again with their respective 'number fours'. Perhaps the most noticeable change to the trusted formula sees the series reverting to the kind of dynamic 3D camera first attempted in *Resident Evil - CODE: Veronica* on the Dreamcast. The dramatic fixed camera angles and pre-rendered backdrops synonymous with the rest of the *Resi* catalogue, and indeed much of the genre, will this time make way for a selection of player-determined perspectives. A choice of two innovative third-person viewpoints and even a first-person camera gives players free rein of the terrifying environments and should considerably up the immersion factor when the action is experienced first-hand through the eyes of returning hero Leon Kennedy.

Although Capcom is remaining tight-lipped about the bulk of the plot details at this stage, arguably the series' most memorable lead will be making a comeback in a story that takes place in South America some six years after the events of *Resident Evil 2*. Much of the

game we've seen so far showcases vast outdoor sections unlike anything featured in previous episodes, yet even less recognisable to fans will be the adversaries lacing Leon's path with terror. Whereas past *Resi* games could be accused of portraying almost cartoon-like horror in contrast to the grisly realism depicted in its more shocking peers, *RE4* looks set to trade its army of traditional zombies for a more humanlike horde of demonically possessed villagers.

In bringing the gruesome creations to life with such photorealistic splendour, the jaw-dropping graphics engine looks certain to steal the show by injecting unnerving levels of authenticity into the nightmarish proceedings while simply eclipsing anything the Cube has ever produced in the visuals department. Textures throughout the sinister environments are astounding, the advanced lighting is used to wonderfully eerie effect, and character models for both the colossal boss creatures and their incredibly lifelike minions are among the most stunningly detailed to appear on any console.

Beautifully illustrating Capcom's determination to emphatically restore the series to its genre-defining form of old, the visuals on display hint at the level of polish being lavished on the project across the board. It all looks to be a tantalising step forward for the series and will certainly provide a massive exclusive for the struggling Cube.



"THE VISUALS ON DISPLAY HINT AT THE LEVEL OF POLISH BEING LAVISHED ON THE PROJECT ACROSS THE BOARD"

JOINT OPERATIONS: TYPHOON RISING



■ All the vehicles are easy to manoeuvre, and as you're able to carry passengers you'll have their lives in your hands.



WAR HAS NEVER BEEN SO MUCH FUN

It's an unavoidable fact that online war games, both on PC and consoles, are a horribly popular diversion. EA's *Battlefield* games and *Return To Castle Wolfenstein* are just a few examples of this booming genre, but since this field was born there has nearly always been *Delta Force*. NovaLogic's flagship series has been championing realism and scale for years, culminating in the forthcoming *Joint Operations* – a highly ambitious title based on a modified version of the *Black Hawk Down* engine. With five character classes, any number of skins and appearances, and a host of driveable vehicles as well as some of the largest maps in a game to date, it looks as though those years of hard work and updates may have paid off.

By the developer's own admission, the single-player aspect of the game is not a focal point, and while there will be a selection of solo missions these will be more akin to training or tutorial missions to make sure the player is ready for the epic online wars. With so many different vehicles and weapons with which to

experiment this will prove a welcome inclusion, but the good news is that lighting up the skies in an attack helicopter is as easy as tearing around in an aquatic APC. Every vehicle can also carry passengers – dashing into battle knowing that it's not only your life on the line but the lives of the four soldiers adorning your exterior (who are even more vulnerable to your mistakes than you are) creates a hefty serving of responsibility. Keys are assigned simply to make switching seats an easy possibility, even allowing passengers to abandon ship at the first sight of trouble and perform all manner of evasive manoeuvres on foot. These soldiers really are multi-talented...

One effect of which NovaLogic seems particularly proud is the 'super-foliage' in some of the deeper jungle maps. This is basically a technique for rendering extremely thick undergrowth. It's easy to see why the company is so happy with it and, combined with the impressive day/night cycle that lights the maps in accelerated real-time, there are some wonderfully impressive (not to mention realistic) locations. This makes for some truly stealthy possibilities, and with a combination of camouflage and darkness you'll be able to enjoy a level of concealment to which the forced shadows of *Manhunt*, *Rogue Ops* and the like can only aspire.

It remains to be seen, however, just how well the whole thing will come together on the scale that NovaLogic is touting,

although we've been impressed with the smaller-scale conflicts we've seen and really look forward to seeing a full-scale war in action. While *Battlefield* and *Counter-Strike* have an unmistakably arcadey feel to them, *Joint Operations* is more a continuation and evolution of everything NovaLogic has given us to date. Realistic equipment selection and carry weights, accurate damage models, and superb mapping and lighting all combine to make for a scarily intense experience, recreating the best tension of, say, *Rainbow Six 3* on a scale seldom seen anywhere in gaming, let alone online.

Offering thrills and potential for gamers who like to slap on some camo paint and play sniper for a while to those who see themselves leading a platoon of tanks and jeeps into battle, *Joint Operations* is likely to be massive in every possible sense.



DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: NovaLogic
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: June '04
GENRE: Shoot-'Em-Up
PLAYERS: 1 (1-100 online)
 ■ Known for its large-scale and realistic tactical shooters, NovaLogic has taken the formula one step further and now offers battles on a scale we've never seen before.

"JOINT OPERATIONS IS A CONTINUATION AND EVOLUTION OF EVERYTHING NOVALOGIC HAS GIVEN US TO DATE"

MOD ME, AMADEUS

With user mod tools shipping on the same day as the game itself, the NovaLogic team is clearly hoping for its many fans and NovaWorld users to get all creative and push the software into unknown territory. This is clearly still a major benefit of PC gaming over consoles – with everything from *Max Payne* to *Battlefield* getting modded to play differently (like the *Matrix* and *Star Wars* mods respectively for the aforementioned titles), and with games coming bundled with tools and tutorials to get the most out of them, exploiting this sizeable benefit is clearly and intelligently becoming a trend. We'll be interested to see both how this develops and also how Joe Public can twist *Joint Operations* beyond recognition. So, naturally, we'll be keeping a close eye on both aspects over the next few months.

JOINT OPERATIONS: TYPHOON RISING

PC

NOVA
LOGIC

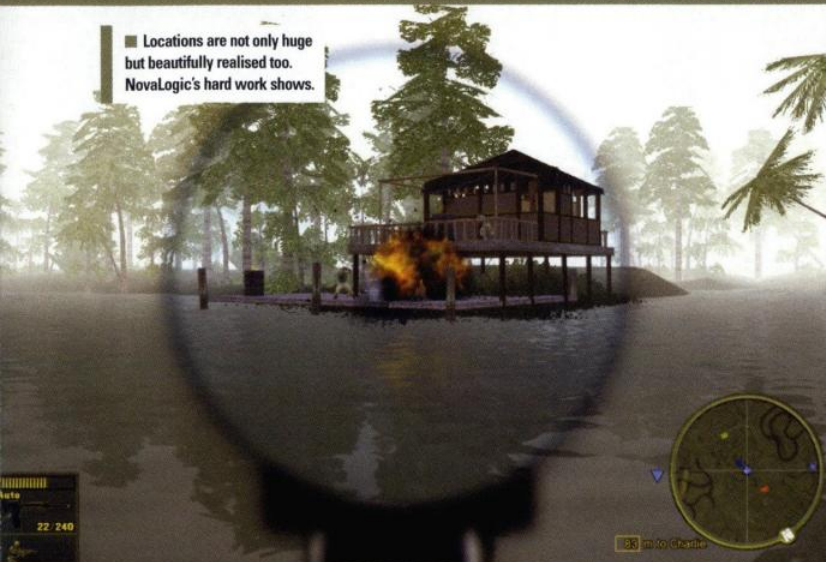
DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ NovaLogic was founded in 1985, but it wasn't until 1994 that the first European branch was opened. Specialising in tactical military action titles, it has established some real brand names like the *Delta Force* games. A privately owned company, its largest outside shareholder is Electronic Arts.

HISTORY

- *DELTA FORCE: BLACK HAWK DOWN* 2003 [PC]
- *TACHYON: THE FRINGE* 2000 [PC]
- *F-22 LIGHTNING 3* 1999 [PC]

■ Locations are not only huge but beautifully realised too. NovaLogic's hard work shows.



■ You can operate a range of vehicles. You can also make your own joke about choppers.

"JOINT OPERATIONS IS THE FUTURE OF WARFARE – IT IS THE SYNCHRONISED APPLICATION OF LAND, SEA AND AIR FORCES FOR MAXIMUM EFFECT"

LEE MILLIGAN, PRESIDENT, NOVALOGIC



■ *Joint Ops* promises to combine realism with playability, which sounds good to us.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

REAL WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION



DELTA FORCE



BATTLEFIELD
1942



REALISM



JOINT
OPERATIONS

THE MOVIES

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

MOVING PICTURES? IT'LL NEVER CATCH ON



THE SIMS



FILMS



CHOICE



THE MOVIES

"THERE IS NO OTHER GAME
THAT ALLOWS YOU TO
CREATE YOUR OWN MOVIES"

ADRIAN MOORE, DIRECTOR, LIONHEAD STUDIOS

■ If you build it, they will come...
Creaky trailers and cheap sets
won't attract the big names.



Scuffle

Violence

Storm

■ Horror movies can be taken in
the direction of cheesy slashers
or silent Nosferatu chillers.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Peter Molyneux has earned a reputation for exceptional 'sim' titles thanks to *Black & White*, *Theme Park* and *Populous*. Molyneux is also notorious for delays, as witnessed with the pantomime saga for a PlayStation2 version of *Black & White*, which hangs in limbo following three years of delays.

HISTORY

- **BLACK & WHITE** 2001 [PC]
- **THEME PARK** 1995 [PlayStation]
- **POPULOUS** 1989 [Amiga]

FOR BUDDING KUBRICKS, KUROSAWAS AND COPPOLAS... THIS IS REEL LIFE

So you felt that for all its acclaim, *Star Wars* had a tendency to err on the wrong side of twee. Maybe you also thought *Schindler's List* dragged its heels and *Citizen Kane* needed a splash of claret to heighten the drama. Preposterous? Perhaps. But at least with film-studio simulation *The Movies* you get the chance to right Hollywood's wrongs and create a masterpiece of your own.

Lights. First, you need to set up your studio. This means dipping into your film budget to buy sets and buildings, which serve different purposes in time-honoured 'sim' tradition. For example, buy a research lab and you can start allocating resources to produce new costumes or scenery. You can dress the sets with props – adding them will affect the outcome of the scene when you finally step behind the camera. It's also important to buy a suitable trailer for your cast, otherwise your A-list stars will be storming off the set during filming.

Camera. You'll need appropriate performers to pout for the camera if you want to bring your three-hour Western epic to life. *Star Creator* takes centre stage here, allowing you to generate new talent or, more importantly, duplicate existing actors. You can customise any aspect from physical appearance to the name, so this

should be comprehensive enough to realise your dreams of directing a romance flick starring Chuck Norris alongside Hilary Duff. If it sounds like too much trouble for too little reward, there will be the option to hire 'in-game' actors as well.

Action! The set's ready, your stars have signed up and all that's left is to shoot the movie. You'll need to choose what you'll be filming from around 2000 scenes, although some scenes can only be used on certain sets. You also need to consider what type of scene your actor is suited to, so if you've got a Steven Seagal likeness then perhaps slapstick comedy isn't ideal. Finally, dress the actors, sit in the director's chair and watch the first scene unfold. You can use a slider bar to influence how the scene plays out – during a fight you can ramp up or tone down the violence, bearing in mind audiences don't want polite pugilists but extreme violence only sells to niche markets. Add more scenes, tweaking the audio and subtitles in the post-editing booth, and your film is ready to roll.

The concept nods to freeform play but extra missions and bonuses throughout ensure *The Movies* doesn't lose structure; for example, a Mafia boss might ask you to cast his daughter in one of your films. Doing so means you can avoid taxes for a

few years but at the expense of your reputation. Add these missions to on-set inter-star romance, temperamental actors with their own entourage, and interfering paparazzi, and suddenly organising the logistics of the movie becomes almost as important filming the picture itself. Advisors will be on hand to help you keep your studio in check and there's an auto-management option for those who don't want to juggle finances to stay in the black.

In true Molyneux fashion, there's no word on a release date and plenty of questions yet to be answered, such as how many film genres will make it into the final version (will it be possible to replicate *The Matrix*'s gun-fu or *Braveheart*'s epic battles?). Despite that, it's hard not to be impressed by the ambition on offer and there's no denying the scope or confidence of Molyneux's vision.



DETAILS

FORMAT: PC, PS2, Xbox, GameCube
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Activision
DEVELOPER: Lionhead Studios
RELEASE: Q3 '04
GENRE: Management
PLAYERS: 1

■ Build up a movie empire from the Twenties through to the modern day by directing blockbusters and fostering future film stars.

GENERIC BUDDY COP COMEDY #53

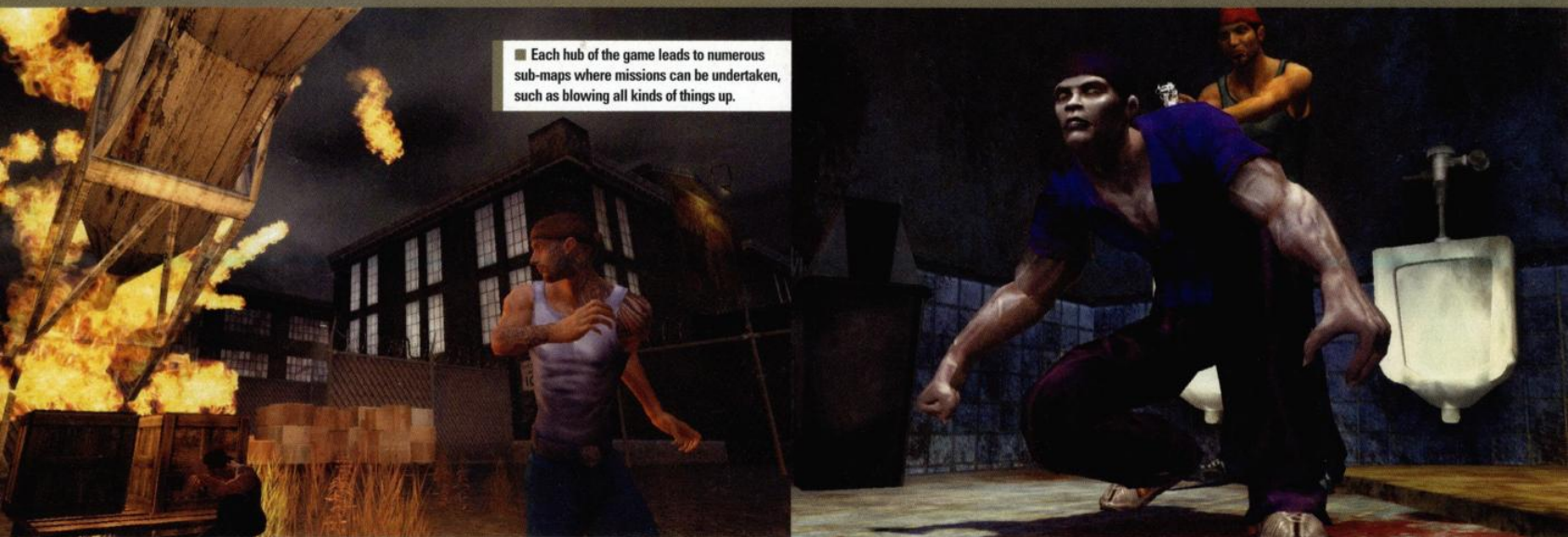
How well your film performs won't just depend on clever management of studios and stars. The script needs care too, otherwise ticket sales will drop off after the opening week. Conversely, a strong script coupled with small-time actors won't bring in the cash until word of mouth spreads. There are other factors to consider, such as the genre – too many babes-'n'-bombs bonanzas and the public will turn elsewhere (unless you're Jerry Bruckheimer). World events influence what films people will watch too. Interest in sci-fi films will soar when man lands on the moon, so make sure *The Space Diaries Of David Earnhart* is in the can by then.

"THERE'S NO DENYING THE SCOPE OR CONFIDENCE OF MOLYNEUX'S VISION"



■ Different genres find favour in different eras. Here, the film mirrors the Sixties explosion of Westerns.

VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE – BLOODLINES



DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Activision
DEVELOPER: Troika Games
RELEASE: Oct '04
GENRE: Action RPG
PLAYERS: 1-TBC

■ The pencil-and-paper RPG evolves again from its previous game form into an action FPS that's heavy on the role-playing elements.

WHO SAYS A COMPLEX RPG HAS TO BE BORING, EH?

Just the thought of transferring one of the most revered pencil-and-paper role-playing games to the videogame format is one that we suspect would send many developers running for the hills. But it's a task that Troika Games has taken up with some relish, despite the possibility of a horde of fanatical players coming down on its head should it mess up. Not that it's planning to, going on how well *Vampire: The Masquerade – Bloodlines* is coming along.

Something of a departure from *Redemption* (the last attempt at bringing White Wolf's *Vampire* series to the videogame medium), the most obvious comparison you can make with *Bloodlines* is that it's *Deus Ex: Invisible War* with vampires; a first-person shooter with distinct RPG elements. However, Troika sees things the other way. "What we're doing differently from any other game out there is that *Bloodlines* is an RPG first,"

says Thaine Lyman, executive producer at Activision. "It's always been an RPG, which is one of the reasons why Troika is the developer because it's got a strong background in RPG development. This is a hardcore RPG with all the elements that you're used to, but then with new concepts from the first-person action world. Other games that are playing in that space go the opposite way by being shooters with RPG elements added in later."

The emphasis on the RPG side of things is reassuring, and it's obvious that the use of Valve's *Half-Life 2* engine is no bad thing – particularly as RPGs have traditionally been one step behind the FPS genre in terms of graphical quality. But that's not the only way that *Bloodlines* is hoping to best its competitors – another advantage is the ease with which it allows players to customise their gameplay experience. The game features all seven authentic Masquerade clans from which to choose, so even something as simple as picking a character can have a massive effect on how you have to approach the game's missions.

Each clan has its own strengths and weaknesses, which in turn means you have to adapt your style of play to suit each situation. Playing as the violent Brujah, for example, makes you better

suited to facing enemies head-on; the elegant Toreador is more adept at talking their way out of situations with persuasion; and the hideous Nosferatu would have you sticking to the shadows to take advantage of their stealth abilities.

"The ability to... be the vampire of your own choosing is a big deal for us," says Lyman. "Whether you're the more social, seductive, 'imposing your will upon others' kind of vampire, the hideous creature who skulks around in the shadows, or just the feral killing machine who transforms and grows claws – every one of those is a valid path through the game. You can still play against type, though – the clans are more a basic template than a straitjacket that restricts what you do."

And it's this freedom of choice that gives us hope for *Bloodlines*. Just as *Invisible War* gave you more than enough chances to shape your destiny, so *Bloodlines* allows you to explore the world as you see fit and become the vampire you want to be. Set across four massive hub areas – Los Angeles, Santa Monica, Hollywood and Chinatown – and with an extensive story arc that changes depending on how you play, there's more than enough potential in *Bloodlines* to make it a great game.

NO EXPERIENCE NECESSARY

While fans will lap up the latest videogame outing for the *Vampire* series, Troika is keen to point out that the game is designed with devotees and absolute beginners in mind. The game's relatively simple interface and attribute system are easy enough for even the most clueless *Vampire* player to grasp. However, gamers who are already familiar with the *Vampire* universe will find every possible feature at their disposal, right down to the stat-covered character sheet that every player needs. It's this integration of the in-depth *Vampire* concept into a relatively simple FPS-style game that helps make *Bloodlines* accessible, without alienating hardcore fans.

"MIXING THE VAMPIRE SERIES WITH AN FPS FORMULA MEANS BLOODLINES CAN BE AS SIMPLE OR COMPLEX AS YOU WANT"

VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE – BLOODLINES

PC



COMPANY PROFILE

■ Formed in 1991, White Wolf Publishing was established with the aim of redefining the art of storytelling. Constantly stretching the boundaries of artistic entertainment through the horror, sci-fi and fantasy genres, the company has expanded from its base of role-playing and mass-market fiction to encompass videogames, television and cinema.

HISTORY

- MAGE: THE ASCENSION 2000 [N/A]
- WEREWOLF: THE APOCALYPSE 2000 [N/A]
- VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE 1998 [N/A]

■ The Nosferatu are particularly hideous beasts, so it's best to stay in the shadows if you decide to play as one of them.

■ Pretty she may be, but you want to be careful of who you talk to in darkened clubs – you never know who might be listening.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

SOMETHING TO GET YOUR TEETH INTO



■ Being an unstoppable vampire-killing machine is all very well, but there's something to be said for the more subtle approach.

"THE HALF-LIFE 2 ENGINE IS VERY MUCH GEARED TOWARDS FIRST-PERSON GAMEPLAY, AND WE LOVE THAT BECAUSE IT'S SO IMMEDIATE"

LEONARD BOYARSKY, CEO, TROIKA GAMES

TALES OF SYMPHONIA

占い師の館へようこそ。
今なら無料で恋愛運を占います

"THE LINE
BETWEEN GOOD
AND EVIL
BLURS IN THIS
IMMERSIVE,
EMOTIONALLY
CHARGED EPIC
ADVENTURE"

NAMCO PRESS RELEASE

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

THE HARD CEL



WIND WAKER



CHRONO
TRIGGER



NAMCO INTROS



TALES OF
SYMPHONIA

■ Some things in
RPGs will never
change, will they?

■ Battles are all about
pulling off massive
chain combos.

買い換えるべきか
今しばらく待つべきか...

■ Cel-shading is nothing new but its
use here is really rather effective.



COMPANY PROFILE

■ Namco is responsible for famous gaming icons and franchises such as *Pac-Man*, *Tekken*, *Soul Calibur*, *Ridge Racer*, *Ace Combat* and *Moto GP*. Its strong arcade presence of the Nineties has dwindled somewhat, with the company focusing instead on multiformat releases and collaborations such as *Donkey Konga* and *Star Fox 2*.

HISTORY

- **DONKEY KONGA** 2003 [GameCube]
- **SOUL CALIBUR II** 2003 [Multiformat]
- **TEKKEN** 1994 [PSone]



■ There's no word on a PAL release yet, so prepare to wait...



THE FIRST IN A SERIES OF GAMECUBE TALES TITLES. BUT CEL-SHADING? COME ON...

DETAILS

FORMAT: GameCube
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Namco
DEVELOPER: In-house
RELEASE: TBA
 (Japan: Out now, US: 31 July)
GENRE: Action RPG
PLAYERS: 1-4

■ The long-standing *Tales* series of RPGs follows Link's lead and comes to the GameCube courtesy of a little cel-shading.

■ To the regular gamer it might seem a bit strange that one of Japan's leading videogames publishers is spending such a significant chunk of time and resources on a format that is constantly battling to stay in second place. And considering the massive falling out that Namco and Nintendo had back in the early Nineties it's even more surprising. But the truth is that the two Ns have kissed, made up, and are now snugly tucked up in bed together. Namco recently attributed part of its positive quarterly results to none other than the exclusive GameCube RPG *Baten Kaitos*, so it'll come as less of a shock that fellow exclusive RPG *Tales Of Symphonia* is getting an English-language conversion.

The *Tales* series is huge in Japan, having been in existence since we were in nappies. It's had many an accolade over the years (including being the first RPG to

feature full speech on a 256Mb SNES cartridge), and the GameCube iteration's selling point is that it's cel-shaded. Okay, it's not much of a selling point in itself but we have to admit that the way in which the team has used the graphical style is very appealing. As with *Wind Waker*, we couldn't imagine the game working as well with any other style.

The game has been out in Japan since August 2002, and its success is almost completely down to the refreshing combat system. Firstly, you can choose to fight enemies instead of randomly falling into an unwanted battle. Opponents appear on the isometric 3D world map meaning that you can avoid them if you want, but in true RPG fashion you won't grow up to be big and strong if you don't eat your greens... er, battle your monsters. Once you're in a fight you're in complete control of your characters. The analogue stick moves your character round the battle arena, while the shoulder buttons let you choose targets and dodge attacks. The controller's face buttons are your main attack buttons, while the C-stick allows you to pull off special moves à la *Capcom Vs SNK: EO*.

Four players can take part, each controlling their own character and racking up the combos. The basic idea is to string together massive combos in order to a) defeat your enemy, and b) score highly at the end of the battle. Indeed, the outcome of the battle isn't down to if you

beat the enemy, but how you do it. The size of your combos, the amount of damage you take, the number of blocks you perform... it all contributes towards your score and reward type at the end of the battle.

At the moment we can't tell you anything about the storyline other than it's a typical 'good versus evil' adventure. The Japanese version is obviously quite confusing, and Namco US has yet to release any details. We expect E3 to offer a fully playable English-language version, but something that is still up in the air is the PAL release. Hopefully either EA or Nintendo itself will pick up the title for release in Australia, but we wouldn't expect to see it until the end of the year. We'll bring you more updates once the US version arrives in the office in a few short months. In the meantime, could someone remind us where we left the Japanese phrasebook?



DON'T BE A DIV

For too long now developers have blamed the GameCube discs' limited storage capacity for low-quality cut-scenes and FMV, but Namco (as *Factor 5* has done) has proven them all wrong. *Tales Of Symphonia* features an extensive anime intro recorded at full quality. Aside from being very impressive in itself, it makes a mockery of those developers who release GameCube versions of their games with inferior cut-scenes. Namco attributes the inclusion of this cut-scene to the compression capabilities of DivX. The intro is typical Namco fare, introducing you to the aggressive-yet-sensitive sides of each character. Just what you need, right?

"THIS GAME'S SELLING POINT IS ITS CEL-SHADING. THAT'S NOT MUCH IN ITSELF, BUT THE WAY IT'S BEEN USED IS VERY APPEALING"

SONIC ADVANCE 3



as the teamwork aspect of *Sonic Heroes*. Hub-based levels and remixes of familiar tunes abound as you progress through an impressive number of stages and we've already encountered some fantastic bosses that remind us what the series is all about. Question is, will these elements push the adventure too far into hazardous territory?

On one hand, the twin character feature is a glimpse at what *Heroes* could have offered and is genuinely useful at times, even if it does stray from the traditional *Sonic* formula. It allows you to call in your CPU partner with the R button and abuse their unique talents to your heart's content – get Tails to carry you to a higher ledge or hitch a glide on Knuckles' back. Of course, this can take its toll on level design but levels are mostly structured well enough to facilitate whatever team you choose. Aside from the new abilities, this is probably the closest anything has come (level design-wise, at least) to the Mega Drive games that kick-started the blue hedgehog's illustrious career; no bad thing by us.

On the other hand, *Sonic Advance 3* often treads a dangerous path. Many areas are even more confusing than the previous game, the later levels of which were like mazes, and there are numerous places where loops or springs need to be used several times to grant access to higher or lower paths. This is the only real drawback in what is otherwise promising to be a sound title. So long as the later stages don't replace the thrill of success and speed with the false exhilaration of hundreds of loops and 'hyper-cool skillz', we'll be welcoming the fallen hero back to our GBAs with open arms.

DETAILS

FORMAT: GBA
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: THQ
DEVELOPER: Sonic Team
RELEASE: June '04
GENRE: Platform
PLAYERS: 1-2

■ After the twin disappointments of *Heroes* and the nightmarish *Battle*, Sonic goes back to doing what he does best – running with some pace from left to right.

ROOM IN YOUR BURROW FOR ONE MORE?

"AFTER WORRYING US WITH THE TEAMWORK ASPECT, SONIC MAKES AMENDS WITH HIS OLD-SCHOOL SENSIBILITIES"

Why doesn't anyone understand that *Sonic* games simply don't work in 3D? While the next-gen consoles have been forced to run polygonal letdowns, the less powerful handhelds have housed much more traditional titles which, to this day, are truer to the hog's roots than any into-the-screen affair could ever be. This third GBA outing for SEGA's mascot is firmly grounded in traditional *Sonic* themes – high-speed negotiation of loops, jumps and corkscrews – with many of the newer ideas from its bigger brothers, such



■ As usual, relative newcomer Cream is accompanied by a rather aggressive Chao.

■ Hurling your buddies at enemies may seem unconventional but it certainly seems to work.

SHADOW OPS: RED MERCURY



■ *Shadow Ops'* portrayal of war is one of the most realistic we've seen.



DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Atari
DEVELOPER: Zombie
RELEASE: June '04
GENRE: First-Person Shooter
PLAYERS: 1-4 (1-16 online)

■ Don't be fooled by its first-person perspective; *Shadow Ops* aims to bring much more to the table than more traditional shooters.

THINK YOU'VE HAD IT TOUGH? YOU AIN'T SEEN NOTHING YET...

■ If you're the type of gamer who enjoys being led by the hand through the first few levels of a game, you're in for a nasty shock. No sooner has Zombie's latest title started than you're immediately plunged into carnage that will have you blubbing like a berated child. Wanting to capture the essence of being in a war zone, *Shadow Ops* does away with tutorials and throws you in at the deep end. The result is akin to that first harrowing viewing of *Saving Private Ryan*; soldiers drop like flies around you, helicopters spiral out of control in the skies above, and explosions create a terrifyingly chaotic atmosphere.

Of course, while Zombie should be commended for taking a brave new approach to a far from original genre, we're not too sure if it will be able to sustain this innovation throughout the rest of the game's 20 levels. At the moment, though, impressions are extremely favourable, with campaigns visiting locations from the snowy wastes of Siberia to the verdant jungles of the African Congo. The environments are realistic and feature impressive lighting and a phenomenal amount of detail – just what you'd expect from a game that's using an enhanced version of *Unreal 2004's* game engine.

Not surprisingly for a title that features so much on-screen carnage, ragdoll physics feature heavily, with the Karma engine ensuring that every death will have you wincing as the latest body flies through the air and lands in an undignified heap at your feet. An impressive arsenal of

weaponry has been expertly sound captured and this further enhances *Shadow Ops'* realism. Whether you're listening to an unfortunate opponent being riddled with sub-machine-gun fire, or taking cover from a launched rocket's fallout, the atmosphere is terrifyingly accurate and perfectly captured by the Xbox's 5.1 digital sound.

Of course, all this would be for naught if Zombie didn't have a game to back up the aesthetics, so you'll be pleased to hear that *Shadow Ops* features more than its fair share of gameplay modes. The Campaign mode is perfectly supplemented by a completely standalone co-operative game and there are more Xbox Live options than you can shake an assault rifle at. As it stands, *Shadow Ops* looks like a welcome alternative to *Rainbow Six 3* and should appeal to those who like their action fast, frantic and deadly.

"SHADOW OPS' FIRST LEVEL
THROWS YOU INTO ONE OF THE
MOST TERRIFYING OPENING
ACTS WE'VE EVER SEEN"

■ Unsurprisingly, you're able to unleash a devastating arsenal. Just make sure you're not around when it goes off.



■ Zombie is a huge fan of *Halo* and *GoldenEye*. Hopefully its own multiplayer will be just as good.

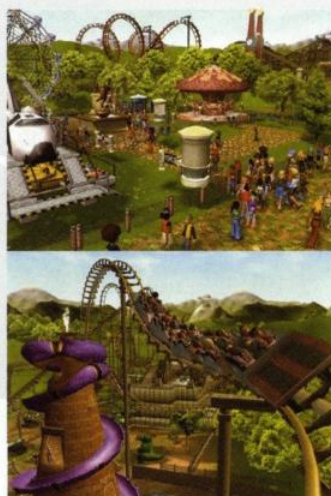
SHOWCASE

MORE THINGS TO WATCH FOR ON THE GAMING HORIZON

RollerCoaster Tycoon 3

BACK ON THE RAILS

Format: PC
Origin: UK
Publisher: Atari
Developer: Frontier
Genre: Management
Players: 1



After the disappointing lack of innovation shown by the first full sequel in Atari's *RollerCoaster Tycoon* series, not to mention the lacklustre expansion packs that soon followed, we were left wondering how much more coaster-crafting goodness the concept had left to offer. Thankfully, a mere glance at the glorious early screens of *RollerCoaster Tycoon 3* reveals that the original isometric framework has finally undergone a lavish 3D overhaul and hints that the game could well be making a welcome return to form. Although we recall Bullfrog's *Theme Park* making something of an abysmal transition to 3D, we've every confidence Atari's series cornerstone Chris Sawyer will keep *RCT3* firmly on the right track.

RELEASE DATE: Q4 '04

Drakengard

ONE MAN AND HIS DRAGON

Format: PlayStation2
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Take 2
Developer: Cavia
Genre: Action
Players: 1



Published in Japan by RPG specialist Square Enix under the name *Drag-On Dragoon*, genre-blurring adventure *Drakengard* does contain a number of role-playing elements but is essentially a feast of third-person action. Following the travels of warrior Kyme and the dragon to which his spirit is tied (it's a long story...) gameplay is split between on-foot hack 'n' slash combat and airborne dogfights aboard Kyme's dragon. The fast-paced melee action accounts for the majority of play and bears more than a passing resemblance to the combo-heavy skirmishes of Koei's *Dynasty Warriors* series, while a separate engine is used to bring the flight sequences to life in a style not entirely dissimilar to SEGA's *Panzer Dragoon Orta*.

RELEASE DATE: Q3 '04

ShellShock: Nam '67

YOU'RE GONNA LOVE THE NAM

Format: PlayStation2, Xbox, PC
Origin: Holland
Publisher: Eidos
Developer: Guerrilla
Genre: Action
Players: 1



Guerrilla – best known for its hotly anticipated *Killzone* project, scheduled to hit the PS2 later this year – turns both its attentions and cutting-edge graphics technology to the battlefields of Sixties Vietnam in what promises to be one of the most deliciously controversial games yet to portray the conflict. Taking the role of a naïve young recruit embarking on his first tour of duty in the ravaged jungles, players are invited to experience the full horror of war complete with gut-wrenching atrocities and unflinchingly fierce levels of brutality. Billed as being closer to the real thing than any of its peers, battle lines are being drawn between the censors and shock-thirsty gamers as we speak.

RELEASE DATE: June '04

Athens 2004

GOING FOR GOLD

Format: PlayStation2
Origin: UK
Publisher: Sony
Developer: Eurocom
Genre: Sports
Players: 1-4



Once every four years we become strangely engrossed in a number of sports we couldn't care less about the rest of the time, so it comes as no surprise that our sudden desire to stage a console-based version of the Olympics is once again being catered for by an official PS2 tie-in. Set to appear on the shelves just before the Games begin for real in August, proven UK developer Eurocom is working in close collaboration with the Athens 2004 Organising Committee to bring us the most authentic recreation of the featured events possible. You'll be able to make Britain's unlikely bid for gold in a host of track and field disciplines, along with an array of aquatic, gymnastic, weightlifting, shooting and equestrian events.

RELEASE DATE: July '04



Canned – Sam & Max: Freelance Police [Xbox, PC]

■ The gaming world was dealt a hefty blow when LucasArts announced that the follow-up to one of the greatest adventure titles ever devised has joined the similarly anticipated new *Full Throttle* game in the reject pile.



Canned – Mythica [PC]

■ Microsoft Game Studios has pulled the plug on persistent online RPG *Mythica*, citing an overcrowded market and other MMORPGs in the pipeline as reasons for the cancellation.

England International Football

Format: PlayStation2, Xbox
Origin: UK
Publisher: Codemasters
Developer: In-House
Genre: Sports
Players: 1-4



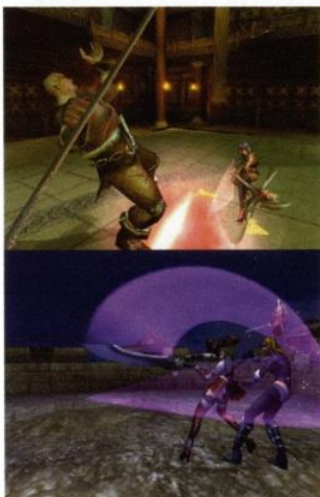
In anticipation of this summer's European Championships in Portugal, Codemasters has secured the rights to produce an officially endorsed England team game. Promising to improve on last year's rather flawed *Club Football* engine in every area of the park, *England International Football's* play is set to feature faster, more intuitive fluidity. The game offers photorealistic likenesses of 25 members of the England squad along with a virtual Sven commanding the troops from the touchline, while commentary comes courtesy of Barry Davies and Gary Lineker. Perhaps most intriguing, however, is the prospect of online co-op and versus play for Xbox owners, making it the first footie title playable over Xbox Live.

RELEASE DATE: May '04

Iron Phoenix

MADE IN TAIWAN

Format: Xbox
Origin: Taiwan
Publisher: Sammy Studios
Developer: InterServ
Genre: Beat-'Em-Up
Players: 1-16 Online



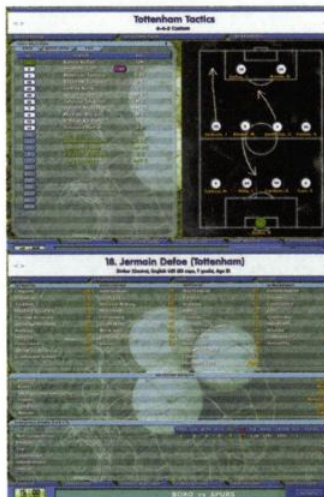
While Sammy is alleging its forthcoming team-based beat-'em-up invents a new genre of online gaming, we're expecting the enticing weapons-based combat to play out something like the epic 16-player Lightsaber battles featured in LucasArts' *Jedi Knight* series. The multiplayer skirmish modes will adhere to the traditional online FPS templates, but rather than repeatedly meeting your demise courtesy of a single bullet from a hidden sniper, the action will involve much more skilled hand-to-hand encounters between combatants. Away from these focal battles over Xbox Live, a single-player campaign enables players to hone their skills in a quest to recover nine magical weapons forged from the shards of a fallen meteor.

RELEASE DATE: Q4 '04

Championship Manager 5

REINVENTING THE BEAUTIFUL GAME

Format: PC
Origin: UK
Publisher: Eidos
Developer: Beautiful Game Studios
Genre: Sports Management
Players: 1-TBA



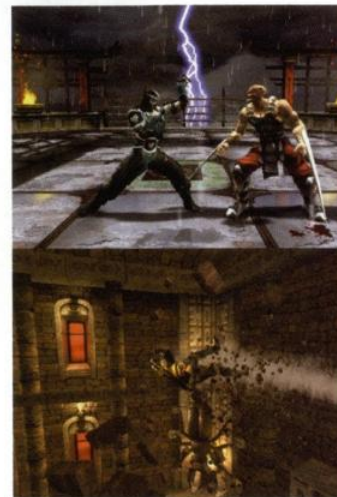
With developer Sports Interactive no longer on Eidos' books, newly formed Beautiful Game Studios faces the colossal task of maintaining the standards set by previous *Champ Manager* games. Off the pitch things look very promising for the rookie studio, with the PFS's worldwide network of professional scouts being employed to produce a highly accurate player database, while early indications of the game as a whole suggest many similarities with SI's masterpiece. The proof of the pudding will ultimately be in how authentically the match engine puts our meticulously considered tactics into action, but Eidos is promising the new CM5 engine will improve on its predecessors.

RELEASE DATE: Q4 '04

Mortal Kombat: Deception

MIDWAY GETS BACK INTO THE RING

Format: PlayStation2, Xbox
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Midway
Developer: In-House
Genre: Fighting
Players: 1-2



Twelve years since *Mortal Kombat* first took the world by storm with its gratuitous levels of violence and gory fatality moves, Midway's flagship fighting series is still going strong. While it takes more than a few splashes of claret to impress today's discerning gamer, Midway has continually evolved and refined the series' gameplay to remain a serious contender in the genre. Few details have emerged about forthcoming blood-fest *Mortal Kombat: Deception*, but the multi-tiered backgrounds look set to introduce new levels of environmental interactivity – including a variety of elaborate scenery-based fatalities – while a selection of mini-games will provide some light relief from the core carnage.

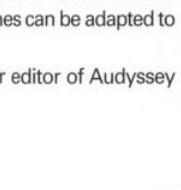
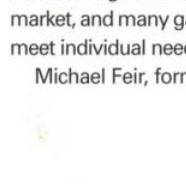
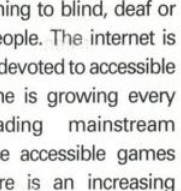
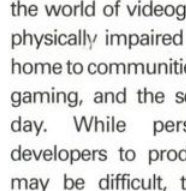
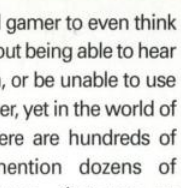
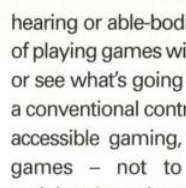
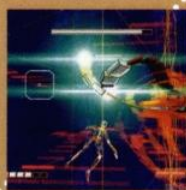
RELEASE DATE: Q4 '04

Going in search of enlightenment, we explore the overlooked world of accessible gaming

Experiencing *Metroid Prime* without any audio or visual input whatsoever would be otherworldly, certainly, but perhaps not in the way the developers intended. Everything would be less tactile, less organic; the illusion would be shattered and the immersive first-person atmosphere (pioneered by *Doom*) would be conspicuous by its absence. There'd be cold and clinical in place of warm and encouraging, and Nintendo's glorious update would no longer be so uniquely rewarding. Crucially, if the visuals were lost or obscured Samus would be up to her knees in acid in no time.

A lack of graphical or sound effects would be the death-knell for many games not because it somehow deadens the gameplaying experience, but because it would eliminate the point of playing videogames: that wonderful audio/visual/tactile amalgam of sensory stimulation that immerses the player. Arguably, the audio and visual elements are two-thirds of the gaming experience and bring a huge amount to a videogame, but for gamers with impaired sight or hearing, what is visible or audible is even more crucial.

It may seem impossible to a sighted,



hearing or able-bodied gamer to even think of playing games without being able to hear or see what's going on, or be unable to use a conventional controller, yet in the world of accessible gaming, there are hundreds of games – not to mention dozens of peripherals and programs – that open up the world of videogaming to blind, deaf or physically impaired people. The internet is home to communities devoted to accessible gaming, and the scene is growing every day. While persuading mainstream developers to produce accessible games may be difficult, there is an increasing number of games created for the accessible market, and many games can be adapted to meet individual needs.

Michael Feir, former editor of *Audyssey*

ESP magazine



magazine – a quarterly publication for blind and partially sighted gamers – is blind and has been since birth, and enjoys playing a range of videogames. “Turn-based text adventures allow me to put myself mentally into situations,” says Feir, “For example, escaping a room filling up with water by finding out how to pry off a ceiling panel with a crowbar. In reality, I’d have very little chance of finding out where a crowbar was lying – these details could be taken in very quickly by someone who had full sight.” Feir is able to play text adventures using a Braille display which turns the text on the screen into Braille characters, though there also screen-reading speech programs that PC gamers can use to turn text into an audio commentary. Sadly, these aren’t foolproof. “There can sometimes be problems reviewing the last paragraph of text resulting from the last move made,” says Reid of text adventures. “I’m hopeful that a speech-enabled interpreter will one day be created which can speak any new text that appears independent of the screen reader.

This would give all blind people ready access to these great games.”

Advances in technology have meant that the pace of blind and visually impaired (BVI) gaming has picked up in recent years, and different genres are now represented. ESP Softworks, which is a major developer of accessible games, is currently working on a driving title, while GMA games has produced a submarine simulator (*Lone Wolf*) and has nearly finished a tank game. One of the main reasons these genres have opened up is through clever use of directional sound or particular noises that mean that gamers who can’t see what’s on screen can instead immerse themselves in sound. “The advent of sound-based games has opened even more doors to us,” says Feir, “We can now face off against hordes of aliens, mutant monsters and other enemies using ear-hand co-ordination.”

For gamers who are unable to hear sound effects and soundtracks, the gaming experience can be just as limited as if their vision was restricted. And, contrary to being helped by modern gaming technology, they can miss out because of it. Reid Kimball suffers some hearing loss and is a level designer at Ritual Entertainment in Dallas, Texas. He’s

MAKING GAMING EASIER

There is a range of software and hardware that’s been designed with accessible gaming in mind. Primarily aimed at either blind or physically impaired gamers, adaptive software can act as a link to regular programs and games. *Jaws for Windows* (freedomscientific.com) is a screen-reading program, while *Window-Eyes* (gwmicro.com) turns Windows text into speech. For gamers with limited mobility, *Game Commander* (gamecommander.com) is a voice-recognition engine that’s compatible with various voice chat programs. *The Claw* (claw.com.au) is a moulded mouse with extra buttons that can be assigned keyboard functions, which can be helpful for people who have problems with hand flexibility.

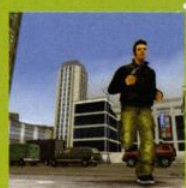
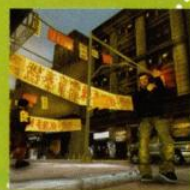
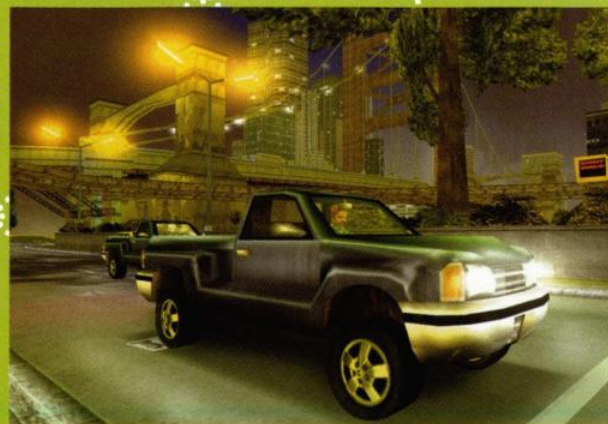
The net is also home to many suppliers of accessible games, some of whom are companies, while other titles are coded by disabled gamers who want titles that meet their specific needs. Most games, such as *Kchess* (a chess game from arkangles.com) and *Dynamon*, *Change Reaction*, *Alien Outback*, *ESP Pinball* and *Monkey Business* (all at adoraentertainment.com), are for blind or visually-impaired gamers. However, some titles – like *Alien Invasion* (a *Space Invaders* clone), *Brickout* (a *Breakout* copycat) and *Ruby Ridge* (a skating platformer), which are all at arcess.com – are not only low-vision-friendly, but their speed can be adjusted to aid gamers with a physical impairment. And this is a just a tiny sample of the games available...

Access all Games

▷ well aware of the problems facing hearing-impaired gamers, and thinks they're the same difficulties that stop BVI gamers enjoying modern titles. "The situation is far worse than it was because now we have actors that voice all the dialogue and so on," he says. "Before we had the media storage capacity all dialogue was in text so at least the story could be understood by everyone. Games were also slower-paced and not as complex as they are today – gamers didn't need many types of information accessible to them in a few seconds."

Whereas the PC is home to most of the titles developed for blind gamers, deaf gamers find consoles more suited to their needs. Vibrating joypads provide valuable sensory feedback, although it's not always in the most helpful way as it is "usually focused only on what happens to the player, rather than vibrating because of the sound of a gun being fired nearby," according to Kimball. Ultimately, Kimball believes that none of the current gaming platforms adequately meet the requirements of accessible gaming, though this isn't necessarily the fault of the console manufacturers. "I think the solution lies in the developers' software instead of hardware," he says.

Sadly, of all the developers and publishers approached for this article, none were able (or willing) to comment. Is this indicative of their unwillingness to address the needs of the accessible gaming community? Kimball seems to think so: "I think the real improvements will come from research, educational or independent developers because publishers feel like they are wasting valuable money if they pay for the development of games that cater to disabled gamers," he says. "They don't see the money in it and don't realise it



shouldn't be about money but about making games better for everyone." Making games better for everyone is an ideal situation, not least because of the social importance of accessible gaming.

Gaming for all

As well as spurring the creation of net-based communities, accessible gaming allows BVI, deaf or physically impaired children and adults to enhance their skills, learn new abilities, and make new friends. Paul Silva, co-founder and lead designer of AllinPlay, a company making games for BVI gamers, has experienced games that have helped blind children improve their spelling, maths and social skills. "I have seen BVI individuals who have been socially isolated for years blossom as they find a community where they can play and interact with people from around the globe, blind and sighted, as equals," he says. Nick Adamson, a blind gamer and programmer of BVI-suited games such the



"I have seen blind individuals blossom as they find a community where they can play and interact with people around the globe as equals"
... Paul Silva



in-progress Flight Commander for PC, believes "videogames are not only a great thing for a blind gamer to relax with but they can be used to build confidence and interpersonal skills." He is very much involved with the disabled gamer scene and feels that blind people have historically been protected from interacting with the sighted world and that BVI gaming is not being used to its full potential. "Audio games can be used to increase the sensitivity of a blind person's main sense, and this is why gaming for a blind person is first of all fun, but, subconsciously, has a much deeper impact."

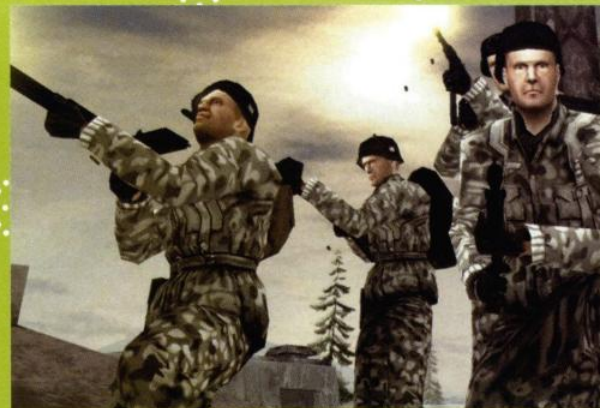
So the argument for videogames as a positive force is a coherent and substantiated one, but gaming means many things to the accessible gaming community on a wealth of psychological and physical levels – even jaded 20-year veteran players subconsciously salivate over the chance to nosemanual their way to fame in the Tony Hawk's titles. Clearly, videogaming supplies stimulation on a conscious level equally as much as it provides subconscious pleasure. Gaming can be truly life-affirming for the accessible community – opening up new worlds and new experiences – so it would follow that ergonomic peripherals and quality games are crucial to enjoyment from the perspective of disabled gamers.

The control issue

"Many of the games and social activities that both children and adults engage in are not very blind- and visually impaired-friendly," says Paul Silva. "Many are

hungering for a way to be able to play and interact with each other and their sighted friends and families without any feeling of being handicapped." He is concerned that videogames for the disabled aren't accessible enough. "Screen readers and magnifiers are not game peripherals but assistive technology that make computers useable. There is a company in Israel selling a tactile mouse, but I have not seen significant progress with that technology as of yet despite its extremely interesting premise." Nick Adamson further laments the inaccessibility of mass-market games to the BVI gamer: "Currently the accessible games market is purely based on the PC. Force feedback increases the realism of the games and around 50 per cent of gamers will have such a joystick or pad. As for game consoles, they are pointless to blind gamers."

Michael Feir verifies that the PC is the disabled gamer's platform of choice, simply because of the peripherals available. "There is talk... about force feedback devices. ESP Raceway will feature support for steering wheels, and a tactile computer mouse made by Virtouch (www.virtouch.com) may also potentially have implications for making games accessible." The question is will there be enough titles to support these devices and make them a worthwhile investment? Even today the PS2 Multitap and the G-Con are not satisfactorily catered for, and the less said about the lack of PSone mouse-compatible software the better.



WHICH WAY TO GO?

With the current state of accessible gaming far from ideal, what would be the best direction for gaming to take to open it up to blind, deaf or physically impaired gamers? For blind gamers particularly, it seems that they play by memorising sequences of moves. This is all very well, but such a technique lends itself much better to the sort of 2D games rarely found on 128-bit platforms but that are flourishing on the GBA (which is not a friendly medium for blind or partially sighted gamers). The increasingly analogue nature of game control and the blossoming of games' scope does not necessarily increase enjoyment for the disabled gamer, so there is still virtue in the dual-plane game – perhaps with an emphasis on sound or vibration feedback. If these elements can be combined, we could be closer to a game that appeals to sighted, blind, hearing and deaf players. If someone can't play, say, the latest photorealistic WWII FPS because they can't distinguish a tank from an ammo depot owing to a universal grey-brownness on-screen, it can severely affect a gamer's enjoyment. Since gaming is all about entertainment, what good is that?

▷ Dr. Silé O'Modhrain, head of the palpable machines group at Media Lab Europe, believes that videogaming "allows young disabled people to participate in an activity that is core to the culture of their peers and, if the interface technologies they use are good enough, allows them to compete as equals, when in so many parts of their lives they can't do this." In an article written for the BBC's Ouch! website, she dispels the myth that games for the disabled fail on an interactive level before lambasting traditional physical interfaces and expressing thanks for low-cost devices like gesture gloves and speech recognition (such as the Game Commander voice-recognition engine).

However, there is currently a limited array of devices for the impaired owing to a perceived lack of demand for videogames for those with special gaming requirements. Not only this, but the question of cost raises its head again, with O'Modhrain's article claiming that videogames are low on the hardware manufacturers' list of priorities. "If pressed, manufacturers of computer access systems would say that, while their goal is to keep up with leading-edge application development as seen in the gaming industry, in reality they need to focus their energy and resources on supporting the applications people need in the workplace," the article says. But surely some gamers – particularly those who have severe physical impairment – may be housebound to a greater extent and be

unable to get access to workplace-based technology? They more than anyone would appreciate home-based gaming.

Tailor-made games

"Adapting individual games for players is a complex and time consuming task and not a commercially practical solution," says Dennis Asher, a web developer at Accessible Arcade Games (www.arcess.com) which makes accessible games. "Accessibility needs to be built into the game design to become widely available," he adds. Accessibility will ideally be married to visionary gameplay mechanics, though. Some of the most rewarding titles in recent times, not least of which the Dynasty Tactics releases, have shown that there is equal merit in the involved and taxing. So can we make all titles playable and rewarding for BVI and hard-of-hearing gamers?



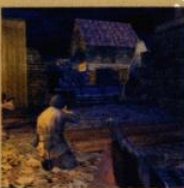
Michael Feir is on the verge of entering into accessible game development himself. "As I see it, the industry is just out of its infancy and is starting to grow," he says. "The only reason I now feel able to develop game engines is that two pioneers have developed game engines to make it easier for people like myself who aren't programmers." But how many publishers are willing to cede to demand and view BVI gaming as a viable investment? Dennis Asher believes that while there is a market for very specialised games (like Arcess Games' canon) for players with the most severe disabilities, the majority of players

NOT KNOWING OR NOT CARING?

According to Australian Bureau of Statistics data from 2001, there are nearly 200 000 individuals in Australia who are blind or have severe visual impairments. The same research also indicated that there are over 2 million deaf and hearing-impaired people in the Australia, many of whom are severely or profoundly deaf. Is the problem that these millions of people aren't aware of accessible games, or that they simply aren't interested in the

first place? "Many people that would enjoy such games have no idea they exist," says Nick Adamson, a blind gamer and programmer. "I was 19 before I realised there were games out there that I could play, and a whole community of blind gamers who congregate on the net. However, thanks to the work of a small number of people in this industry the number of blind gamers is growing."

Obviously, there are problems associated with accessible gaming that sighted or hearing gamers don't face, such as the additional expense of adaptive software (like a screen reader) or a special controller. Josh de Lioncourt of Adora Entertainment Software Development, which has created a number of audio-based games, thinks that part of the problem is also the fact that accessible games don't have the exposure that comes as part of being developed or published by a 'mainstream' company. "To the best of my knowledge and experience, no mainstream developers cater for the blind or any other disability group," de Lioncourt says. "Some electronic games have done so, such as Star Wars Simon which was released in conjunction with *Episode I: The Phantom Menace*, but none of the 'big's' like Sony, Nintendo or Microsoft have shown much interest." Unfortunately, we were unable to get comments from any of these 'big' companies...





with disabilities are not severely disabled but still have impairment significant enough to render most existing games unplayable. Evidently, some videogames (Viewtiful Joe for one) cause enough hair pulling without further impediments.

"Often," Asher says, "minor changes to those games is all that is necessary. While a completely barrier-free game environment needs to be built at the earliest design stage and tested throughout the development of the game, often a relatively small change to a game design or interface can significantly improve access." Happily, a version of Viewtiful Joe (Revival) has been released in Japan featuring a Sweet mode intended to ease players into the game because even the original Kid mode was semi-hardcore. And for games like The Sims or other PC-based titles, something as simple as making the sprites and icons bigger would be a huge help for low-vision gamers.

Feir is still surprised that nobody has made a side-scroller with stereo sound. "Games like Mario would be relatively easy to make accessible," he says. "You just have to make certain that all of the monsters and elements had their own sounds associated with them and make sound decisions about sound priority." We can hope that technological advances will create a level playing field and that the majority of the games that can be picked off the shelf in a high-street store will be accessible to all gamers. But it will be a while before an addictive slice of the gaming pie like Advance Wars, for

example, can be appreciated by anyone with a sight problem more severe than red-green colour blindness. "While the past decade has seen major improvements in access to educational and productivity software, there has been little improvement in game accessibility," observes Asher.

Getting heard

Paul Silva is more cynical when questioned on the state of the commercial side of disabled gaming, and isn't sure change will come quickly. "The game industry is a highly volatile industry primarily led by extremely conservative publishing companies," he says. "These companies will not take interest in the BVI community's need until one of two things happen: someone proves that this market is very sizeable, or someone sues the game companies and insists that they comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act and similar legislation. But this does not look seem likely to happen any time soon."

Disabled gamers have come to realise that they represent a previously untapped source of revenue for developers and publishers willing to cater for what is perceived to be a minority group. Although people like Paul Silva, Nick Adamson, Dennis Asher and Michael Feir have a lot of work to do before they attain mass-market penetration and persuade big publishers to releasing relevant titles, what the industry needs to realise is the disabled gamer has a very clear picture of what makes videogames great.



"The past decade has seen major improvements in access to educational software, but there has been little improvement in game accessibility"
... Dennis Asher

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THE AVERAGE

Despite representing an industry in which high scores mean everything, **games™** is not a magazine that marks with the majority. A lot of people think that anything below seven (7.0, 70%, whatever) is a bad score – we don't. Going on a scale of one to ten, five is the average – average being a game that does what it sets out to do without attempting to do it better than anyone else. If a game gets five, you'll get some enjoyment out of it but nothing more, simple as that. What's more, we won't be swayed by PR people telling us what a game's like – we only decide once we've played each game to death and, in the majority of cases, to completion. If a game's bad, we'll make sure you know; if it's great, we'll sing its praises. At the end of the day, we're just here to help you decide what's worth your hard-earned cash. After all, if it wasn't for you, we'd be out of a job.





Is it a plane? Is it a train? Is it a sandwich toaster? No, it's all three. The shape-shifting Autobots are back to take on the Decepticons in a mecha-esque romp...

Transformers

084

Unfortunately, the CGI tends to detract from the in-game visuals, which is shame when they look so good.



Visit shops like this one to get your hands on essential potions and weapon upgrades.

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED

Xbox

ORIGIN

Japan

PUBLISHER

Microsoft

DEVELOPER

Tecmo

PRICE

\$99.95

RELEASE

Out Now

PLAYERS

1

NINJA GAIDEN

NINJAS, DRAGONS AND ROCK-HARD BOSSES – JUST WHAT THE XBOX ORDERED

It's all Capcom's fault. Ever since *Devil May Cry's* Dante burst onto our screens in a dazzling display of fluid athleticism and daring gunplay, the arcade adventure has never been quite the same. Indeed, few titles (if any) have come anywhere near Shinji Mikami's work of art, and for every *Rygar* there have been several below-average efforts like *Castlevania*, *Chaos Legion* and even Capcom's own *Devil May Cry* sequel. Eager to prove that *Rygar* was no fluke, then, Tecmo has allowed Team Ninja to go back to one of its earliest series and resurrect the adventures of Ryu Hayabusa, one-time ninja master and regular participant in Team Ninja's *Dead Or Alive* franchise. The end result is a breathtaking romp that juxtaposes superbly implemented combat with intrusive CGI cut-scenes and the sort of archaic puzzles that would make the *Resident Evil* franchise proud.

Unfortunately, all is not well for Hayabusa; his village has been burnt to the ground – along with the majority of his ninja brethren – and the Dark Dragon Blade has been stolen by the monstrous demon Doku. Swearing revenge, Hayabusa sets off through some of the most gloriously detailed environments we've ever seen

and, in doing so, helps to bring a new lease of life to a rapidly stagnating genre. Of course, considering *Gaiden's* unapologetic arcade roots, you're not going to find a staggeringly complex narrative or any startling revelations as you make your way through the heavily CGI-led plot. What you will find, though, is some of the most kinetic, highly charged gameplay that's ever leapt onto your Xbox.

From the moment you unleash the fury of your fully charged Dragon Sword to the final showdown with *Gaiden's* last boss, every slash, swipe and slice is an absolute joy. Ryu Hayabusa is easily one of the most athletic characters we've ever seen and, like Capcom's Dante, he exudes a cool, almost arrogant swagger as he leaps around the screen and dispenses death to anyone that's foolish enough to come within a hair's breadth of his blade. Using the various face buttons, Hayabusa can unleash a devastating array of moves that allow him to throw assailants, deliver deadly strikes of Shurikens and even decapitate his foes, leaving a gushing fountain of blood in his wake. Although initially equipped with his family's Katana and a never-ending supply of throwing stars, careful exploration of Hayabusa's surroundings results in a few additions to his



Fans of the *Dead Or Alive* franchise will recognise this minx, but where's Kasumi?



"RYU HAYABUSA IS EASILY ONE OF THE MOST ATHLETIC CHARACTERS WE'VE EVER SEEN AND HE EXUDES A COOL, ALMOST ARROGANT SWAGGER"

limited arsenal. Incendiary Shurikens, vicious bladed flails and huge oversized blades are just some of the many weapons that can be collected, and all come with their own signature moves and animations. Many can also be upgraded, which opens up even more combos for your nimble protagonist.

While combat is nicely balanced between ☐ melee and missile, though, *Gaiden* only really comes alive when Hayabusa is dishing out death on a face-to-face basis. Combat is reassuringly solid and every move feels extremely satisfying to pull off while connection is gratifying – all enhanced by the sheer amount of claret on display and the thumpingly good soundtracks that increase in tempo as you face even greater adversaries. Once you've finally dispatched your foes (not an easy task when certain areas allow them to respawn as soon as you return to them), their mutilated bodies will leave behind *Onimusha*-style Orbs. Yellow Orbs reward you with money,

Blue ones restore lost energy and Red Orbs can be used to restore used Magic; the more outlandish the combo, the bigger the Orb you'll receive, which in turn allows you to buy new weapon upgrades, special armlets or new types of magic. Upgrading your weapons is essential as you'll quickly gain new abilities and be able to perform even more impressive moves.

As good as *Gaiden's* combat may be (and it's ☐ very, very good), it's not without a few flaws. With such a hyperactive main character, it was inevitable that the camera would have a hard job keeping up with him and, sure enough, certain angles do tend to ruin an otherwise terrific combat system. While a quick press of the R-trigger does allow you to re-centre the camera behind Hayabusa – à la *Jet Set Radio Future* – it can still prove immensely frustrating when you're backed up against a wall with nowhere to go. Perhaps in order to show off Hayabusa's skills to their maximum effect, *Gaiden's* camera often feels too

FAQs

Q. HOW MANY CHAPTERS?

Sixteen, and unless you're some sort of gaming god, they're going to take you a fair few hours to complete

Q. ANYTHING TO COLLECT?

Gold Scarabs are scattered around. Take them to the shopkeeper and exchange them for various items.

Q. IT CAN'T BE THAT TOUGH...

You'd better believe it. There are ways to make Hayabusa's life easier, though, with the most obvious being to upgrade your Dragon Sword as soon as you can.



HERE BE DRAGONS

Ninja Gaiden may feature a stunning array of bosses, but few come close to the massive skeletal Dragon for sheer pant-wetting excitement. You'll first meet your bony foe in a dormant state as you start travelling deep underneath the game's monastery. Once you've uncovered the relevant missing artefact the monstrous behemoth will come to life and proceed to show you a serious amount of pain. Despite its size the Dragon moves with an almost catlike grace and will attack with a variety of bites, claw grabs and tail swipes. It's a perfect example of how well Team Ninja has executed every boss battle, and while you'll find many of the fights extremely hard going, the satisfaction you feel when you've won is immense.

■ He might look disgusting, but his bark is definitely worse than his bite. It's all fancy make up, anyway...



▷ low to the ground and creates a claustrophobic effect. Again, it's easily rectified but that doesn't stop it being an annoying fault. But the constantly whipping camera is the least of your problems; on top of this, Team Ninja has created one hell of a tough game.

■ You really are in at the deep end here, as straight from the off you're thrown into the thick of it, with early assailants in the form of rival ninjas proving to be daunting foes in battle. Even with a judicious amount of potions and the ability

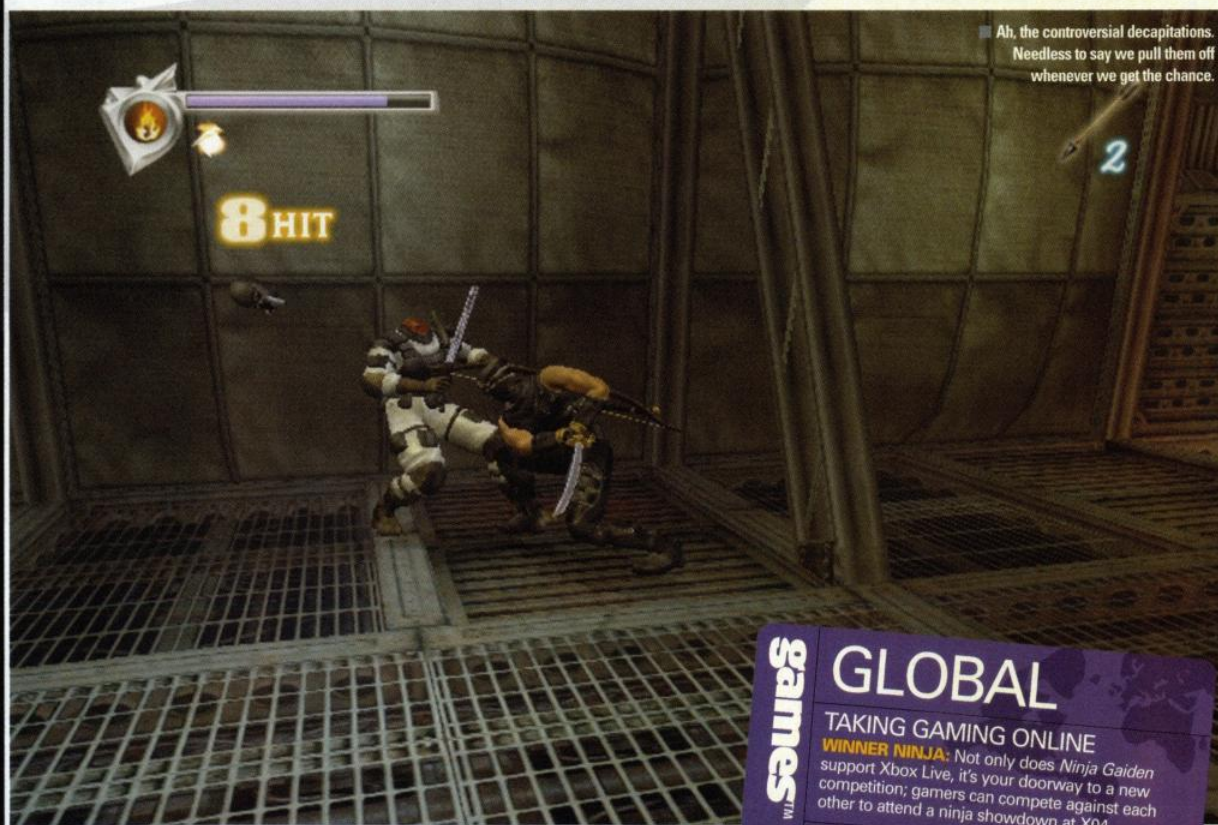
"THIS IS ONE OF THE MOST DIFFICULT GAMES WE'VE PLAYED RECENTLY, BUT ALSO THE MOST BREATHTAKING"



■ Incendiary Shurikens are great for delivering huge amounts of damage. Be sure to avoid the blast, though.

to buy further items from shrines and shops, early levels of *Gaiden* quickly become a test of endurance – something that's made fully apparent by the many bosses you face. Most are immense and dish out huge amounts of punishment – just look at chapter six's impressively animated Bone Dragon and its devastating bite for an example of what you're up against – with many requiring careful planning before they eventually fall to your blade.

■ Yet while *Ninja Gaiden* may be one of the most difficult games we've played in the last few months, it's also one of the most breathtaking. Cranking up its *Dead Or Alive 3* engine to previously unseen levels, Team Ninja has delivered exactly the sort of game we were



■ Ah, the controversial decapitations. Needless to say we pull them off whenever we get the chance.

games™

GLOBAL

TAKING GAMING ONLINE

WINNER NINJA: Not only does *Ninja Gaiden* support Xbox Live, it's your doorway to a new competition; gamers can compete against each other to attend a ninja showdown at X04.

NIGHTSHADE



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



DEVIL MAY CRY

24: TIMELINE HIGHLIGHTS

THE BEST BITS IN THE GAME AND WHEN YOU CAN EXPECT TO SEE THEM

00:20 MINS



○ You should have reached the Nunchuku-wielding Murai. He may have arms that look stuffed full of walnuts, but providing you block he's easy to beat.

04:00 HOURS



○ You'll be getting to grips with *Gaiden's* difficulty and begun exploring the inner city of Tairon. Here you'll meet Rachael, a Fiend Slayer with a huge Warhammer.

2 DAYS



○ You should have a variety of decent weapons and be well on your way to defeating the final boss (and no, we're not going to spoil it for you). You're now a qualified ninja.



■ Fighting in confined areas is a pain, but it creates huge combo potential.

hoping for visually. Lush lighting, a superb use of textures, and a rock-solid frame rate – locked at 60 fps, we might add – are just some of the delights you can expect to see as Hayabusa continues his bloody quest for revenge. The sheer amount of detail to be found in the game is staggering, and while certain environments lack character (the city of Tairon springs to mind), the quality on show is evident from the very start.

Unfortunately, the loving care that was ☐ bestowed upon the game's visuals and kinetic combat was only able to stretch so far. It's not that we're disappointed with the simple *Resident Evil*-style puzzles that appear throughout Hayabusa's adventure, but it would have been nice if they'd received the same attention as *Gaiden's* blistering fight scenes. Later levels do require you to use more of your abilities – running along multiple walls to discover new routes, for instance – in order to achieve your goals, but we can't help feel that this was a missed opportunity on Team Ninja's part. Nevertheless, *Gaiden* isn't really about the puzzles and while it's easy to dismiss the



■ With your energy so low, here's the perfect chance to refill your health.

sometimes-simplistic conundrums in favour of something with a little more substance, they're only a small part of the *Ninja Gaiden* experience.

This game's heart lies in its satisfying combat ☐ and in this it excels to deliver a game that's currently unrivalled on its host machine. As developers continue to search in new directions for the next big thing, it's hardly surprising that many of them resort to plundering their back catalogues – after all, Nintendo's been doing it for years. Fortunately, the decision to revive Hayabusa was a wise one, and while he won't be troubling Dante's crown just yet, Team Ninja has built some very solid foundations for the future.



UNLOCK THE MAGIC

It's criminal that so many remakes of past classics forget (or are unable) to include the original game that inspired the update in the first place. Fortunately, Team Ninja has thoughtfully provided you with all three NES *Ninja Gaiden* games to play at your leisure and relive all those fond memories from your childhood. Of course, you have to work for your treats and as a result it may be some time before you sample all three games. Collecting 50 Gold Scarabs will net you *Ninja Gaiden*, while attaining specific ratings on each level will unlock *Ninja Gaiden II* and *III*. Fortunately, there's an even easier way to get your hands on the last two games, but you'll have to work that out for yourself...



VERDICT **8/10**

CHALLENGING, SATISFYING AND A TECHNICAL TRIUMPH

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED

GameCube

ORIGIN

Japan

PUBLISHER

Nintendo

DEVELOPER

In-House

PRICE

\$99.95

RELEASE

Out Now

PLAYERS

1-4

MARIO GOLF: TOADSTOOL TOUR

LEAVE YOUR 'TEE' AND 'LINKS' PUNS AT THE DOOR, PLEASE

The mixture of golf and videogames is a strangely potent one. Golfing games seem to appeal to a far wider audience than the sport itself and even those who have never so much as picked up a club often buy into them. The craziest part is that the sport isn't even particularly well-suited to the medium of games – offering no simultaneous play and requiring a substantial time investment, the experience is fundamentally a primitive one. Nevertheless, such games have an allure that is difficult to place but impossible to deny, and while we may never understand the world's love for digital golf, we'll freely admit to being part of the problem. When done well, golfing can be among the most time-consuming and involving gaming experiences, and if there's one man who knows his way around a set of clubs, it's a plumber. Well, one particular plumber really.

Even from the lavish opening and the first few holes, this latest round of *Mario Golf* exudes class. Character models and effects are of an impressive quality and, short of a few slight camera oddities, Mario and his pals have never looked better. Looking at the box, you'd be led to believe that the sound quality would be of the same level –

but though the Pro Logic II logo graces the packaging, *Toadstool Tour* is far removed from the likes of *The Wind Waker* and *Metroid Prime*. Consisting of generally nondescript tunes and a fairly limited selection of quips, the audio aspect of the game is by far the weakest element, yet still manages to just about redeem itself with a few choice cuts. Character voices are fine to a point but when three other players are mashing on their joypads to fill your screen with taunts and abuse, the otherwise amusing lines soon begin to grate. To make matters worse, unless your gaming chums are particularly well-behaved, trying to get them to stop could prove as futile as asking your *Halo* co-op partner to kindly stop hitting you in the back.

One of the best things about *Toadstool Tour* is that even if it weren't for the familiar characters and settings, you'd know it could only have come from one of a select few firms. Over the years, Nintendo has managed to develop a kind of magic normally only associated with the likes of Disney, and the way in which the characters move and act on the courses is simply beautiful. From Diddy and Donkey Kong's simian play styles to Wario and Waluigi's evil cackles and temper tantrums, the wonderfully realised cast is every bit as well

FAQs

Q. HOW MANY COURSES?

Seven in total, one of which is a jungle course consisting entirely of par 3 holes. Definitely one for hole-in-one seekers.

Q. CHARACTERS?

Twelve pretty obvious ones to start you off, with four less-so following as unlockables, as well as GBA link-up.

Q. HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?

With so much to do so many times, you'll have your work cut out to even come close to doing everything.

ACE GOLF



BETTER THAN

AS GOOD AS



TIGER WOODS 2004



■ All the usual *Mario* suspects are here and all have been superbly realised, giving the game a great atmosphere.



■ Beginners can get the game to work out their swing for them, but if you want a little more control then you'll want the manual option.



■ Donkey Kong's swing is somewhat unorthodox. But then he is a monkey so it's rather unfair to expect a Seve Ballesteros-style display.

games™ **ENHANCED**

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

CHUNKY: Modes, courses, options... you name it, there's more of it this time around.

LINKED: *Toadstool Tour* will link to the forthcoming *Advance Tour* to give extra characters and suchlike.



■ What kind of *Mario* game would it be if there weren't piles of Coins lying around, just waiting for someone with deep pockets to come along?



personified as it is rendered. Even the courses themselves are like nothing you'd expect in a golf game – teeing off from boats, avoiding Chomps and using Warp Pipes as shortcuts all come into play, among many other original features.

This originality and variety is carried over into play modes as well – in addition to all the expected modes, you'll be treated to target-hitting, Coin-collecting, slot machines and a massive amount of challenges and tasks. Many of these will need to be completed with every character and even in co-operative multiplayer in order to claim true victory, but with a decent amount of unlockables and augmentations up for grabs, you'll not go unrewarded. We put a fair few hours into the game but still managed to be ashamed by the Records screens – if you seriously want to leave an impression on the checklists and charts, we're talking hundreds, if not thousands of hours of play. But don't worry – many of the key extras can be made available with substantially less effort, though you'll have to work on your game to see them all.

Despite all the primary-coloured bells and whistles, *Toadstool Tour* is still a golf game – a very good one, but a golf game nonetheless. If you're not a fan of the sport or games that simulate it, we doubt our moustachioed friend will change your mind. Just realistic enough so as not to alienate avid golfers and with enough enjoyment and simplicity to welcome beginners with open arms, *Mario Golf* is a typical 'easy to play, difficult to master' affair. With so much to do, it's easy to lose hours on just one mode, and taking into consideration the multiplayer elements and potential for repeat plays there's probably more to do than you ever actually will. The cutesy presentation belies a more competent engine than many would guess – golf isn't all about Tigers and Outlaws any more.



EASY DOES IT

One of the best aspects of *Mario Golf* is the ease of the swing system yet the complexity it manages to hide. For beginners, two simple taps of the A button is all it takes to perform a mighty drive, but it won't be long before you find you need a little more control over your shots. When this happens, you'll need to use Manual mode whereby pressing B to stop the power bar means you have to gauge accuracy yourself. The payoff is that you gain greater control of the ball, allowing for all manner of spin to be applied. Given the broad variety of modes on offer, you really will find yourself using both methods, and while precision is required on the tougher courses, the 'hit and hope' technique is more suited to Speed Golf and lazy play alike.



■ In multiplayer, the controller can be used to unleash insults or encouraging comments towards your opponent.



■ The Congo Canopy course is a birdie-hunter's dream – par 3 holes all the way, so there's no excuse for double-figures on that scorecard.

VERDICT 8/10
LIGHT-HEARTED AND ENJOYABLE SPORTING FUN



OPTIMUS ISN'T PAST HIS PRIME JUST YET

TRANSFORMERS

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED

PlayStation2

ORIGIN

Australia

PUBLISHER

Atari

DEVELOPER

Melbourne House

PRICE

\$99.95

RELEASE

13 May

PLAYERS

1

■ One Autobot against an entire Decepticon platoon? It's best to turn into a car and sprint for the next checkpoint.

Let's start on a positive note, shall we? Melbourne House's hard work has resulted in what is undoubtedly the best game based on the *Transformers*

licence ever. See? Nothing like a bit of optimism to get a review going, especially if it provokes the kind of quote-worthy fodder you'd expect to see splashed across adverts. However, just as *Simpsons Hit & Run* managed to become the best *Simpsons* game simply by not being absolutely atrocious, so *Transformers* performs exactly the same feat by besting dire examples such as *Beast Wars* on the N64 and the recent *Takara* effort on the PS2. But while this could lead you to believe that *Transformers* is as enjoyable as eating broken glass yet still comes top of the pile, there's a silver lining – the game's actually not that bad.

Okay, so perhaps the phrase 'not that bad' doesn't instil confidence, but there's no denying that *Transformers* at least manages to press a few of the right buttons before things start to go wrong. For example, Melbourne House has clearly pulled out all the stops to make the game look as good as

it does, especially considering the amount of detail on show no matter how busy things get. Even more impressive is just how big each level is – sprawling regions designed to take you ages to fully explore, all without the hindrance of slowdown or loading. With the rule being that if you can see it, you can usually reach it, we're really rather amazed that *Transformers* even runs on the humble PS2.

However, it's not all just about pretty graphics.

While old-school fans might believe that the whole *Armada* setting manages to desecrate our fond childhood memories of the original series by changing virtually everything ('Megatron, a tank? That's rubbish!'), *Transformers* turns this negative into a pretty convincing positive thanks to those damn Minicons – the small and almost Pokémon-esque robots that seem to be so important to today's transforming machine. There are over 40 of the little blighters scattered throughout the game, each endowing your Transformer with a different ability simply by assigning them to one of the four shoulder buttons. Naturally, some

FAQs

Q. NOT OLD ROBOTS THEN?

Sorry, but no. Atari's game is based on the new *Transformers: Armada* universe that, going by the cartoon, is actually quite rubbish.

Q. MINICONS?

They're special 'bolt-on' accessory robots that give your Autobot additional skills. Deciding which to use once you've found them is a key part of the game.

Q. LOADS TO DO?

Not really. Going back for Minicons you've missed is obviously the big thing, but in terms of finishing the game you're talking hours rather than days.





abilities – shields, better blasters, rockets and even handglider-style wings – come in more useful than others, but your combinations are restricted by the power gauge; attach too many of the powerful Minicons and you'll overload, meaning you can't head out to complete your mission. It's this careful balancing act that helps add a strategic edge to the overwhelmingly frenetic blasting action and, thankfully, the whole game is better off for it.

That said, there's no getting away from the fact ☐ that *Transformers* is at heart an all-out arcade shoot-'em-up and it's here that the game falls down. Reminiscent of the flaccid *Brute Force*, *Transformers'* core gameplay couldn't be any simpler: sprint from checkpoint to checkpoint, blast anything that gets in your way and then fight a bigger enemy at the finish. Storming through hordes of Decepticlones is certainly fun at first, but it soon gets dull repeating the same old 'strafe left and right while running' tactic, particularly once you've found the more powerful weaponry and shields that take the challenge out of fighting enemies. Unfortunately, there's virtually nothing else to do – the expansive levels are impressive but devoid of any motivation to explore, apart from collecting the occasional Minicon and special Datacons that might unlock some concept art.

And that's just the tip of the problem iceberg. ☐ Whether it's the clunky controls that make negotiating the jumping and ledge-walking sections overly tricky, or the sliding animation that happens whenever you walk over an area that's too steep and leaves you vulnerable to attack, there are plenty of tiny niggles that prove to be more disruptive to the gameplay than they sound. What's



more, the ability to transform from a robot into a vehicle is sorely underused. Short of being able to cover long distances more quickly (something the terrain rarely allows anyway, covered as it is in trees, crevices and other obstacles) and mowing down smaller enemies, there's practically no reason to use it – annoying, seeing as that's kind of the point of being a Transformer in the first place.

And that pretty much sums up *Transformers* in ☐ a nutshell – fun, but too annoying and limited to be anything more. It's technically impressive, but that's not all you pay for and, sadly, the gameplay can't cash the cheques that the visuals write. The best *Transformers* game ever? Certainly. But worth \$100? You could get yourself an original Megatron reissue for that...



I HAVE THE POWERLINK

A little way into the game, you'll gain the ability to use your Powerlink buddy – a Minicon unique to each Transformer that can be activated to give you a temporary advantage over your enemies. Hit the Square button and you'll activate the Powerlink ability (effectively just a fancy term for bullet time). Everything but your robot slows down, allowing you to dodge shots and generally take on an entire squad of Decepticlones without being overwhelmed. Unfortunately, this ability drains your energy and can leave you seriously vulnerable once you deactivate it, meaning the whole thing's pretty pointless. It might look special, but you'll hardly ever use it unless you're feeling suicidal.

BRUTE FORCE



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



GUN METAL

games™

FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE
FAR AWAY: If you can see a point on the horizon, you can usually reach it – a rarity for a console game.
LICENCE TO KILL: Licensing issues mean the 'real' Transformers can't die, so we have Decepticlones.

VERDICT **6/10**

SHALLOW FUN IN AN ATTRACTIVE ROBOT SHELL



■ We never get tired of racing these.



DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED

Xbox

OTHER FORMATS

PC

ORIGIN

UK

PUBLISHER

Codemasters

DEVELOPER

In-House

PRICE

\$99.95

RELEASE

Out Now

PLAYERS

1-2 (1-12 online)

AND SO BEGINS THE EPIC TALE OF V8 SUPERCARS 2...

V8 SUPERCARS 2

Driving games might seem one-dimensional by their very nature, but there are different approaches to this genre that developers can take.

There's plenty of room to accommodate adrenalin-charged seat-of-your-pants racers and simulations that ask you to take the perfect racing line. However, despite Codemasters' best intentions, there's no escaping the fact that shoehorning a storyline into the constraints of a driving game is ill-advised.

It seems trifling to concentrate on an aspect of the game that was perhaps intended as an hors d'oeuvre and not the main meal itself, yet rather than benefiting from its narrative, *V8 Supercars 2* suffers. As the structure of the game has been

forced to fit around the plot, there's little choice in how you progress, nor does it help that tasks are consistently difficult simply to tie in with the story. Worst of all, the plot itself is banal, doing little to justify its inclusion at the expense of a flexible game structure. Not that the cause for frustration can be pinned solely on Story mode – the game's handling has to take its share of the blame too. Falling into the same camp as *Project Gotham Racing's* 'simulation with a dash of fun', control is more about racing lines than speed. However, clipping grass or taking a corner too sharply will send your vehicle into a tailspin; by the time you've recovered the pack will have roared ahead, making restarting the race the only option as no podium finish means you have to start again anyway. You'll find yourself slowing to a crawl for each corner because of the marginal room for error and the strict objectives, but as your rivals also creep around corners at low speed you're never punished for your 'softly, softly' approach. Being so deliberate feels stilted and unnatural, making it hard to build up any rhythm.

Fortunately, this timid approach isn't always necessary thanks to the various driving styles. This is the most appealing aspect of *V8 Supercars 2* and not knowing whether your next challenge will

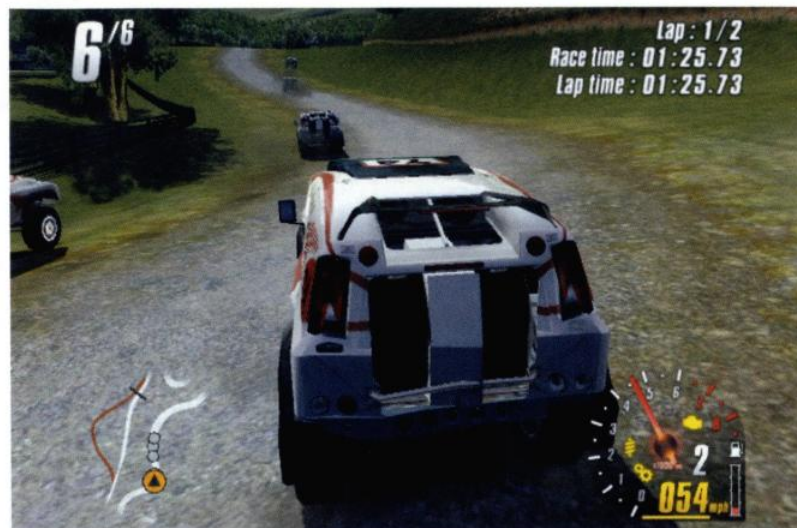


THE SPICE OF LIFE

V8 Supercars 2 doesn't have a striking USP under its belt, so it's hard to point to any aspect of the gameplay that's made real strides and pushed the boundaries for racing games. What it does offer is a variety of racing styles that's unmatched in the genre. Sadly, each vehicle comes with its own quirks and faults, the Formula Ford cars accentuating the frustrating and unbalanced elements of the handling while racing Super Trucks is too cumbersome. Even the rally stages suffer from *V-Rally* bouts of twitchiness, despite being the pick of the bunch. Nevertheless, the light, arcade handling of the rally cars complements *V8 Supercars 2's* Codemasters stable-mate *Colin McRae Rally 04*, rather than meekly imitating it.



■ Ignore fellow drivers at your peril, as smashing into them will be detrimental to your car's overall attributes.



FAQs

Q. HOW LONG?

Thirty championships split into eight seasons isn't as much as it sounds but there's plenty of replay value.

Q. LOCAL TRACKS?

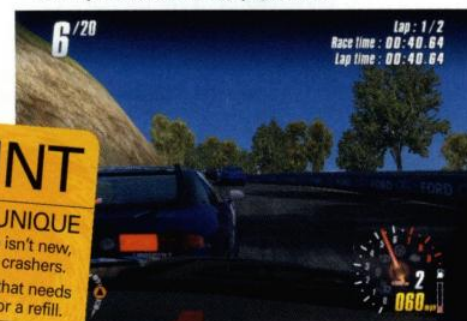
Nearly got 'em all. Most importantly (let's face it), you can race Bathurst. Or would you buy this game for some other reason?

Q. OPPOSITION?

Some races see you up against 19 other drivers, which works particularly well on the oval circuits.



■ You have to unlock the tracks and vehicles – such as these stock cars – before you can use them in two-player battles.



FINGERPRINT
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE
DAMAGED GOODS: While car damage isn't new, TOCA 2 comes down heavily on frequent crashers.
GIMME FUEL: There's a petrol indicator that needs monitoring so you know when to pull in for a refill.

see you buckling up in a vintage classic or Nissan Skyline keeps interest high. Logic dictates each new vehicle would take some getting used to, so it's surprising to find the transition between cars is often seamless. The off-road stages prove the most enjoyable, as you can throw all caution to the wind, put your foot down and fling your car around the track with reckless abandon. Such contrast in racing styles is refreshing, but it's a shame there's no option to mix and match tracks with cars – you can only use rally cars on the rally stages, for instance.

Graphically, *V8 Supercars 2* pulls its weight. The vehicles look gorgeous, displaying a sheen that's almost on a par with *PGR2*. Car damage has been included and while it looks a little too clean it does affect how you race. Anything from brakes to steering can be affected and the difference in handling is marked enough to ensure you race with care and make the necessary pit-stops, rather than taking your chances. Those who do run the gauntlet also run the risk of race-ending terminal damage, although it's still quite difficult to completely incapacitate your car. The leniency here is much appreciated when the game chooses to be

so rigid elsewhere.

Unfortunately, multiplayer hints only at what could have been. Free from the shackles of Story mode, the racing is allowed to flourish without rigid objectives tying you down and the harsh handling is acceptable when racing alongside equally susceptible human opposition. While a limit of just two players and four AI cars will disappoint gamers using a single Xbox, Live and System Link caters for up to 12 players. There's also the chance to see how you rank amongst players worldwide and, perhaps most importantly for the impatient, all the tracks and courses are unlocked from the start.

Ultimately, though, *V8 Supercars 2* lacks the ambition and verve found elsewhere in the genre. We've seen *Burnout 2* accelerate into oncoming traffic, *PGR2* screech onto the perfect racing line, and *Colin McRae Rally 04* slide through gravel. After all these, uneventful jaunts down the middle of the road just don't excite us any more...

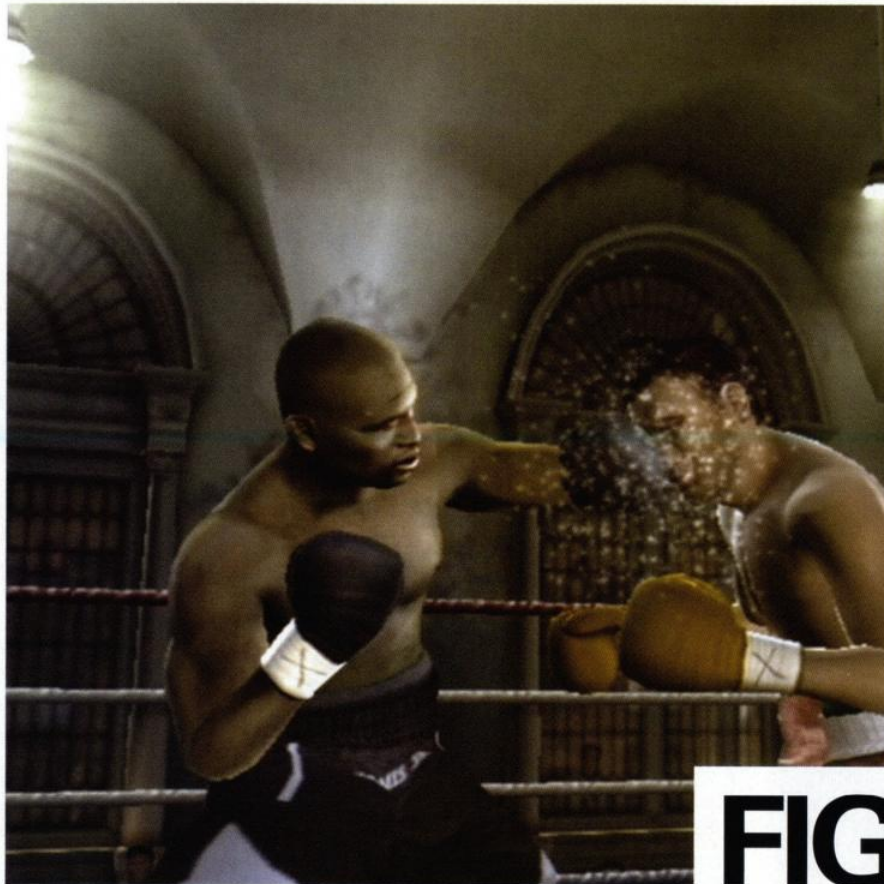


PC \$89.95 OUT NOW



The keyboard highlights the handling weaknesses and races turn into joyrides. But if you have a steering wheel then indulge yourself as there's little to compare on PC.

VERDICT 5/10
JACK OF ALL TRADES, MASTER OF NONE



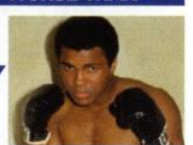
■ The impressive physics make every punch you manage to land incredibly rewarding.

WILL SMITH



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



MUHAMMAD ALI

FIGHT NIGHT

■ *Fight Night* figurehead Roy Jones Jr teaches *Knockout Kings* endorser Lennox a thing or two.



■ The fluidity of control when punching and blocking is unparalleled.

EA GIVES THE COMPETITION A POUNDING

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED

PlayStation2

OTHER FORMATS

Xbox

ORIGIN

US

PUBLISHER

EA Sports

DEVELOPER

In-House

PRICE

\$99.95

RELEASE

Out Now

PLAYERS

1-2 (PS2 Online)

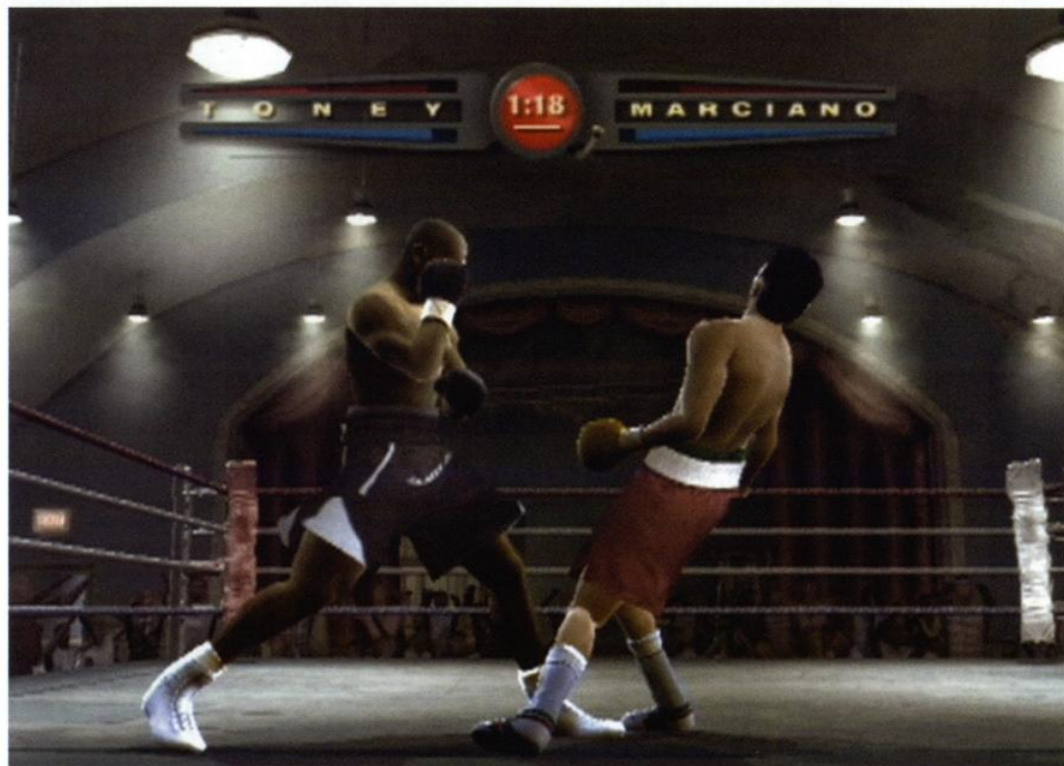
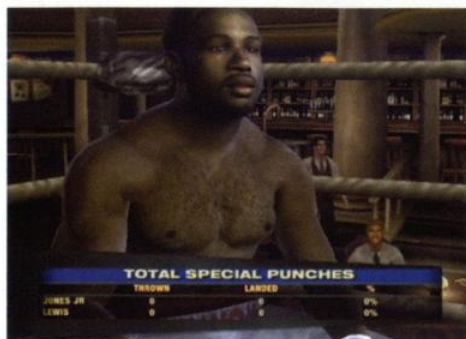
Wait a second; you're actually reading this? But you know this is a boxing game, right? You're also probably aware that it's another EA Sports boxing game and yet still you persevere? The only explanation we can think of for a cultured gamer like yourself behaving in such a way is that you've seen the big blue eight at the foot of the next page and you're demanding some answers as to what the hell is going on. Surely it would have taken a miracle for EA to transform the tedious button mashing synonymous with the now-defunct *Knockout Kings* series into anything that would warrant our seal of approval? Well, suspend your cynicism for a moment and come with us into an unfamiliar dimension where miracles do happen and the letters EA stand for gameplay excellence.

As part of an ongoing initiative to lace its long-running sports franchises with innovation, EA clearly took a long, hard look at the intricacies of its previous boxing sims and displayed an admirable degree of objectivity by promptly binning the lot and starting afresh. But in a genre where attempts to capture the sport's true essence via the medium of gameplay have consistently fallen tragically short of the mark, where could the development team look for inspiration? To the arcades, of course. Far from the lifeless spectacle of their console-based peers, such interactive experiences as Konami's calorie-burning *MoCap Boxing* have brought show-

GLOBAL
TAKING GAMING ONLINE
KNOW THY ENEMY: Records and punch stats for your opponents are available before you fight.
WARM UP: Competing in exhibition bouts won't affect your competitive record and ranking.

ROCKY BEGINNINGS

As if the basics of the sublimely playable and brutally rewarding combat system aren't enough to keep you occupied, the Career mode injects some perspective into proceedings as you embark on an epic journey from obscurity to the top of the world rankings. You'll be able to meticulously customise the appearance of your boxer and evolve their attributes between fights in a number of training mini-games. Arguably the best way to progress your grasp of the controls, the 20-year career also enables you to unlock a variety of new arenas, equipment and even special effects with which to personalise your ring entrances.

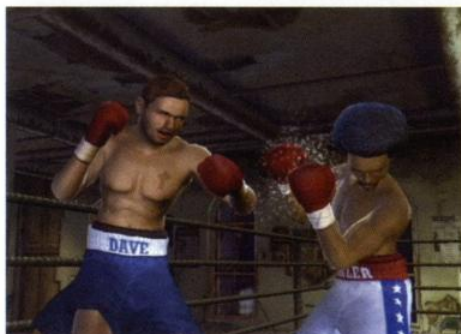


2004

stopping ingenuity to the genre, while SEGA's 1992 classic *Title Fight* pioneered a fabulously intuitive control scheme far more suited to home console translation. Players would grasp the cabinet's twin joysticks and control their boxer's fists by making the corresponding motion with the sticks.

Admittedly refined to an impressive degree ☐ here, the foundations of SEGA's arcade heavyweight lie at the heart of *Fight Night 2004*'s sublime gameplay. Condensing the concept of 'Total Punch Control' to a single stick, movement of your left and right gloves is linked to the respective 180-degree arcs of the right analog stick. Straight punches, hooks and uppercuts are all performed by making the equivalent motion with your thumb, allowing players to deliver the right blow in any split-second gap that appears in their opponent's defences. A similarly intuitive defensive system is employed to equally impressive effect. Holding L1 lets you roll your fighter's body 360 degrees with the left thumbstick, allowing for some wonderfully fluid ducking and weaving, while R1 shifts the right stick's functionality to an eight-way blocking system for absorbing any blows. The resulting gameplay captures all the thrills and skills of the sport magnificently, as your thumbs authentically mirror the actions you'd make in reality. The level of satisfaction in every skilfully timed exchange is genuinely breathtaking.

Yet the fabulously involving control scheme is ☐ only half the story in EA's grand overhaul of the



■ Hone your skills by taking your fighter from local gyms to the world title.

genre's lacklustre conventions. Merely replacing the traditional button tapping with authentic punching motions could have been considered a gimmick had the whole thing not been staged within such a superbly realistic physics engine. EA proudly asserts that no two knockouts will ever be exactly alike depending on positioning, angle of impact and, perhaps most significantly, the momentum introduced into the deliciously realistic equation. Spiced with the perfect degree of exaggeration, every cleanly landed blow connects with devastating ferocity while knockdowns genuinely leave you wondering whether your victim will ever walk again.

The physics engine allows play to exist within a ☐ fabulously liberating sphere of realism, which combines with the superbly intuitive controls to deliver one of the most authentic and immersive recreations of any sport. The confines of boxing itself impose some limitation in areas such as variation but, in taking this genre from a dead end to the cutting edge of gameplay authenticity, *Fight Night* is an absolute triumph.



FAQs

Q. KINGS OF THE RING?

A selection of 32 legendary fighters feature in the game. They're joined in the dynamic rankings of the Career mode by a near infinite number of generated contenders.

Q. REDUNDANT FACE BUTTONS?

All regular punches are manually 'thrown' by guiding your fists with the right thumbstick, with the face buttons relegated to 'illegal blow' and 'taunt' duties.

Q. TOTAL REALISM?

While the controls and physics make for a highly authentic experience, the incessant huddling and single-punch KOs of real boxing have been sacrificed in the name of Rocky-esque entertainment.

XBOX

\$99.95

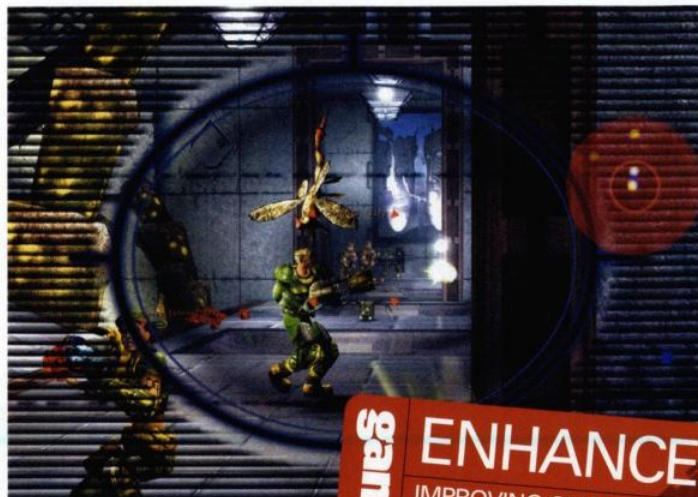
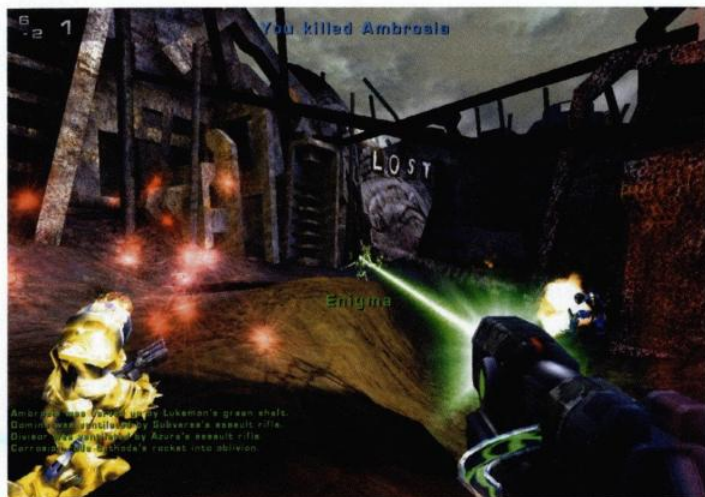
OUT NOW



As if the PS2 visuals weren't impressive enough, the Xbox benefits from added crispness. The lack of online play is a sad omission, but the package bursts with gameplay goodness.

VERDICT 8/10

INSPIRED INNOVATION, LACED WITH POLISH



games™ **ENHANCED**

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL
CHAIN REACTION: New mode Onslaught is arguably the best on offer here.

RETRO CHIC: Set sound and weapons to mimic the original, and some favourite levels are here too.

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED

PC

ORIGIN

US

PUBLISHER

Atari

DEVELOPER

Epic Games

PRICE

\$79.95

RELEASE

Out Now

PLAYERS

1 (1-32 online)

MINIMUM SPEC

128Mb RAM (356Mb on Windows 2000 and XP), 5.5Gb HDD space, 8x DVD-ROM, DirectX 9-compatible sound card, 64Mb of video memory

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004

BETTER LATE THAN NEVER, RIGHT?

The days of Unreal being Quake's little brother are well and truly over. Epic Games has established Unreal as a solid First-Person Shooter franchise on the back of some enjoyable games and the latest instalment, *Unreal Tournament 2004*, looks set to follow in the same footsteps as its forebears. Nobody would accuse the game of being deep or even particularly innovative, but we like the honesty of Epic's approach. It's a shooter, and that's all. Is that enough? We think so.

Once again, the *Unreal* experience is a frantic and reaction-based one, and even the more complex modes work well with everything tearing around at breakneck speed. The net code is such that most games we played were seldom struck with lag – always a big concern, especially with the pace and precision involved. Assault mode makes a welcome return, even if several maps are a little too convoluted, and new modes like Onslaught and the interesting co-op monster hunting of Invasion really make this more than just another annual update.

The single-player campaign has more weight this year too, and while playing against bots is often worlds apart from a human opponent the chance to learn the levels, hone your skills and find your favourite tool is welcome, especially with the high standard of AI on display. After hand-picking your team, you battle through all manner of big-money competitions, all the while buying new stars, paying players' wages and amassing a fortune in the management-lite core.

If you've ever so much as seen an *Unreal* Tournament game, you'll know what to expect here and, thanks to the addition of vehicles, modes and maps galore, this clearly represents the culmination of genre evolution thus far. It's difficult to see where the series can go from here, but we're sure to find out in the next 12 months or so, right, Atari?

VERDICT 8/10

FORMULAIC AND FAMILIAR, BUT SOLID AS THEY COME

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2003



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



TIMESPLITTERS 2





■ It's nice to let the keeper have a crack when you've got a good lead.



■ Celebrations are a mixed bag, from backflips to boring non-events.



■ Players now help each other up after nasty tackles, but not this time...

THE KONAMI ARMY STILL MARCHES ON

WINNING ELEVEN 7 INTERNATIONAL

DETAILS
PS2
FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2
ORIGIN
Japan
PUBLISHER
Konami
DEVELOPER
In-House
PRICE
\$Variable (Import)
RELEASE
TBA (Japan: Out Now)
PLAYERS
1-8

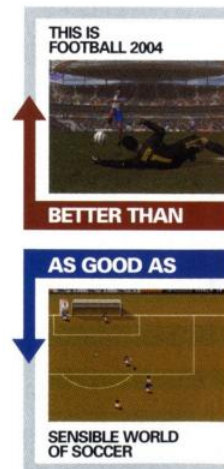
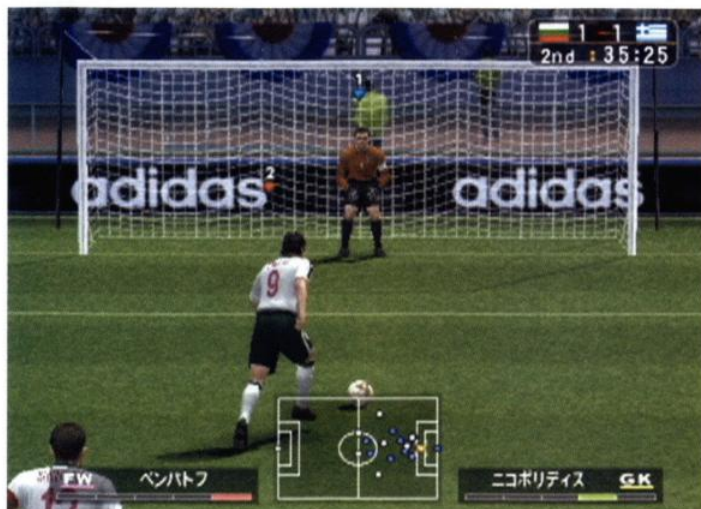
So then, when is the long-promised and much-touted *Pro Evolution/ Winning Eleven* online play finally going to be implemented?

Naturally, recent news of an Xbox *Pro Evo* has got a few tongues wagging, but in the here and now, we're still without network support for this generation's best sports series. Online or not, we've finally got hold of a copy of Japan's latest update in the popular football series and, after extensive play (purely in the interests of research, you understand), we think we've more or less settled on just what sets this apart from its illustrious predecessors.

To the untrained eye, *International* could very well be simply an import version of *Pro Evo 3* – changes are small and while their effects are noticeable to those well-versed in the ways of the series, it's hardly the leap that *WE6* to *Final Evolution* was. As is always the case with this

series, 'enhancements' are double-edged, so while we're overjoyed that the handball, offside and advantage rules have all been tweaked to good effect, it's not all encouraging news. The effects of the speed stats have been toned down slightly to create a more balanced and skilful experience; this, in reality, only serves to render a whole bunch of speed-reliant teams near redundant. There is also a whole host of new animations thrown in to make for a more broadcast-style front end – more like something from the EA stable than what we've come to expect from Konami.

Once again, *International* offers a challenging and enjoyable single-player investment but it's not until a second controller comes into use that it truly shines. Quite how a game can be so deeply rewarding one minute and so profanity-inducing the next remains one of the biggest mysteries in the industry, and as worked up as you may get there is an unmistakable allure that won't let you reach for the Reset button. If you've already got a version of *Winning Eleven 7* or *Pro Evo 3*, this is not enough of an update to warrant re-buying, but newcomers who have the means to play import games may want to consider picking it up, especially given that this is the most complete and the most import-friendly edition to date. As long as you're not averse to the idea of sitting down for a few hours and renaming a lot of players, that is...



VERDICT 9/10
EVEN CLOSER TO PERFECTION

NOT SO MUCH FLOGGING A DEAD HORSE AS PRODDING A DEAD DONKEY

DETAILS



FORMAT

Arcade

ORIGIN

Japan

PUBLISHER

SNK Playmore

DEVELOPER

Yuki Enterprise

PRICE

\$2 per play

RELEASE

Out Now

PLAYERS

1-2

SAMURAI SHODOWN V



While Capcom fans around the world had to make do with just the *Street Fighter* legacy until crossover titles like *X-Men Vs Street Fighter* came along, supporters of the SNK brand have always had far more choice of fighting fare. *Fatal Fury*, *Art Of Fighting*, *King Of Fighters*, *Last Blade*... whatever your preference and playing style, there was something for you. However, thanks to a careful balance of elegant locales, finely tuned characters and a reliance on timing rather than flashy combination moves, the *Samurai Shodown* series remains one of the firm favourites among many people. Or at least, it did until the latest instalment came along.

It might have been riding high on a wave of expectation since it was announced, but SNK's fifth *Samurai Shodown* game has washed ashore with little to offer. The title's graphical style is dated, thanks in part to this being one of the very last games to use SNK's ageing AES technology

■ Admittedly, some of the backdrops looks quite nice, but then most of them have been pilfered from the last game, so that's hardly a plus.



(although older games, such as *Garou: Mark Of The Wolves*, actually look better on the same system). Visually, the original *Samurai Shodown* was beautiful – full of authentic Japanese architecture and atmospheric locations which went a long way towards creating the game's unique feel. Unfortunately, this latest offering from Yuki is not only disappointing from a technical point of view, but it's actually far less creative from an artistic perspective too. One level, for example, is set in front of a Japanese palace, while another is on the deck of a galleon – both great locations, but ones that look cobbled together without quality craftsmanship. Unfortunately, aside from these flawed new backgrounds, many of the others on offer have been lifted straight from *Samurai Shodown IV*, only re-drawn with gaudier colours.

But this distinct feeling that Yuki has merely pilfered what it considers to be the better aspects of the last game and then slapped a new number on the package doesn't stop there. The

■ Here's Kusaregedo, proving that he's next to useless at doing anything – all his moves are easy to avoid, making him the worst character ever.

■ Each character has very different playing styles, but that only serves to unbalance the gameplay and make some absolutely useless.





■ The Rage Explosion is still here, as activating it is the only way you'll be able to gain access to your character's single devastating super move.



games™
FINGERPRINT
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE
TAKE A SLASH: As before, this game relies on timing rather than combos.
TIP THE SCALE: The 2D backgrounds scale in and out to make fights more dramatic



AS GOOD AS IT GETS

Out of all the new ideas in *Samurai Shodown V*, only two are really of note. Below your life meter there's a new element called the Kenki Gauge that dictates how much damage you do to your opponent. Stand still and it rises but as you attack it decreases – constant attacks might punish your enemy, but they'll reduce your attack strength as a result. There's also a new move called Mu no Kyouchi which can only be activated when you've lost a round and have virtually no energy left. Doing so activates what can only be described as bullet time, allowing you to pummel your opponent as they move in slow motion. Interesting, but hardly the most original of ideas.

developer's seeming lack of appreciation for what has been an otherwise decent series carries right through from very basic things like the main interface to the gameplay and beyond. Pretty much everything on offer has been done far better in the previous titles and the new characters – who range from the petite, bow-and-arrow-wielding Mina to the virtually uncontrollable Kusaregedo (who's so large that he almost doesn't fit on the screen) – don't make the impression you'd expect of new additions to the roster. Indeed, having experienced the development of the series since its very beginnings, it's fair to say that there's very little within this fifth outing to convince newcomers, or indeed veteran *Samurai Shodown* players, to have a go.

Naturally, there is a flipside to all this, if only because of the game's heritage. The gameplay that's been carried over from the previous titles is still commendable, comparing well to many newer offerings. As before, the combat still relies on timing instead of combos, with precise connections and well-placed hits managing to remove as much as 25 per cent of your opponent's life gauge. In addition, to make the game even more realistic, the developer has included the ability to hit the deck to avoid swipes aimed your way and even kept the

option to commit an honourable suicide during the last game if a fight isn't going your way. But to be honest, both features feel slightly tacked on and a more experienced *Samurai Shodown* player will soon brush them to one side in favour of more traditional tactics.

This particular concern is one that seems to dog every aspect of *Samurai Shodown V* – the new elements are pretty useless, and the old favourites haven't been improved enough to warrant making the game worth playing. What matters worse is just how slapdash the application of the core gameplay has become; many of the characters are unbalanced (making one-on-one human battles rather pointless), and yet even if you decide to choose the weakest against a computer opponent, you should be able to get to the last boss without any real challenge. Despite the anticipation, *Samurai Shodown V* is a real disappointment – only hardcore fans are likely to enjoy this, and even then the enjoyment will be short-lived.

VERDICT 3/10

A LACK OF INNOVATION RESULTS IN DISAPPOINTMENT



FAQs

Q. NEW FACES?

Only four, although four others are 'reinvented' by appearing in their Bust incarnations from earlier *Samurai Shodown* games.

Q. WHAT'S MISSING?

Lots of things from previous efforts – there's no Bust or Slash options, the Rage Enhanced and Sword Grade systems are gone, and a number of lesser tweaks have also been removed.

Q. ANY STORY?

The Japanese version does contain in-depth story scenes and other interesting elements, but there's no English translation so it's all missing from the Western release.

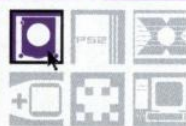
■ The shift in style from cutesy to quasi-mature is a touch heavy handed but presents some interesting visual moments.



■ Some of the creature animations are absolutely beautiful, especially the overly dramatic throes of 'fainting'.



DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED

GameCube

ORIGIN

Japan

PUBLISHER

Nintendo

DEVELOPER

Genius Sonority

PRICE

\$99.95

RELEASE

24 June

PLAYERS

1-4

POKÉMON COLOSSEUM

STILL CAN'T TELL A SNORLAX FROM A SPOINK? TURN OVER NOW...

If you're not a fan of Nintendo's colourful licence to print money, this game will be less important to you than a Blazin' Squad tribute album.

If, on the other hand, you've put in the hours on *Ruby* or *Sapphire* then you'll be wanting (or needing) to get *Colosseum* – but know this: while there is definitely purpose and enjoyment here, this is not the ultimate monster-battling game that it so easily could have been. The same separated attack animations that plagued the N64 games aside, there's a fair amount to do in the two very different game modes but this is a severe case of Nintendo preaching to the converted.

The biggest problem with *Colosseum* is that you'll find it not only filed under 'mixed bag' but practically stapled to the sign itself. Monster models and effects are as well-realised as anything else the Cube has produced lately, yet some less impressive trainers appear to be suffering due to the resulting polygon shortage. One town will be a lush forest haven, the next a third-rate Lego settlement. Every element of the presentation is similarly erratic – music can jump from orchestrated beauty to sub-MIDI ear torture

in a matter of minutes, but, worst of all, monster calls are still of the same blippy 8-bit quality that they were back at the dawn of the phenomenon.

It seems that one man's inter-console collectathon finale is another's last-ditch attempt to save the over-flogged horses of connectivity and Pokémon. With the link-up aspect started back on the N64 and the series still going strong commercially and critically, we'd have to say it's definitely closer to the former, and while *Colosseum* isn't anything like the revolutionary title that's needed to change the fortunes of the Cube (or raise the profile of connectivity), it's still an important part of the Pokémon series. Be it the fact that this generation of monsters is now fully accounted for, the notable change in the direction and feel of the series, or just the fact that this combines RPG action with the familiar Stadium battles, this is definitely a case of better late than never. It's just a shame it couldn't have been a bit more consistent.



VERDICT 6/10

DECENT RPG FARE THAT WILL DELIGHT FANS

ENHANCED
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL
TREASON: Turn neglected Pokémon against their evil owners for the first time.
PLOT: A huge Story mode accompanies the usual battling to add an extra layer of gameplay.

POKÉMON STADIUM



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



JADE COCOON 2



DOWN, DOWN TOWARDS, TOWARDS, PUNCH – THE FAMOUS SPECIAL MOVE LIVES ON...

HYPER STREET FIGHTER II: THE ANNIVERSARY EDITION

DETAILS	
	PlayStation 2
	Japan
	Capcom
	Capcom
	\$79.95
	4 June (Japan: Out now)
	1-2

■ A one-move wonder he might be, but Balrog's sheer strength still makes him a firm favourite in our eyes.



Newsflash: 2D fighting isn't dead just yet. Mourners may have wept their last pixelated tears, yet the genre continues to defy its sell-by date.

While it remains to be seen how much more life can be squeezed out of two dimensions, though, Capcom has at least exhumed *Street Fighter II* for a glorious tribute to the series' past.

Put simply, *Anniversary Edition* is a compilation of *Street Fighter II* games covering the era between *World Warrior* and *Super Street Fighter II X*. What makes this collection unique is that every fighter from every game has been brought together, meaning you can have *Turbo Ken* versus *Championship Dhalsim*, *Super Cammy* against *World Warrior Blanka* and so on. It's a clever move that breathes new life into Versus mode, which still shows a

surprising capacity to entertain. Yes, part of the appeal is hearing Ryu's battle theme and instinctively humming along, or the satisfaction at executing Zangief's spinning piledriver, but this game's success owes as much to flamboyant character design, depth and balance as it does to nostalgia.

Not including mid-game button configuration ☐ is an oversight that becomes apparent when you have *Street Fighter* fans brought up on different editions, consoles and pads, but it does little to tarnish the appeal of the timeless Versus mode. This is great news for fans – however, newcomers may find the experience slightly wanting. The single-player game is a series of fights against *Super X* opponents without a plot to give the fights meaning, or even bonus rounds to break up the pace. Games like *Capcom Vs SNK 2* successfully distracted gamers from their flimsy single-player structure with a wealth of modes and playing styles, but *Anniversary Edition* doesn't benefit from this scope; understandable, given its age, but it's still something to which Capcom should have paid more attention.

There's little incentive to scratch the surface of ☐ the game if you're not familiar with the series, as the fighting initially feels basic alongside *Virtua Fighter 4* and its ilk. While it can be argued that *Anniversary Edition* is rather incestuous and never tries to appeal beyond its fans, outsiders probably wouldn't be keen on this party anyway. But for those invited to Capcom's celebration the future of the genre is uncertain, but, oh, to remember the past...

VERDICT 7/10

DEFIES ITS AGE BUT ALIENATES NEWCOMERS



TERRORISTS BEWARE – VALVE HAS YOUR NUMBER

COUNTER-STRIKE: CONDITION ZERO

games™

ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

CLEVER: Bots are now smart, hunting you down and disarming explosives with scary accuracy.
GUN RACK: All your favourite weapons and more besides are available for all your lead-flinging needs.

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED

PC

ORIGIN

US

PUBLISHER

Vivendi

DEVELOPER

Valve/Turtle Rock Studios

PRICE

\$69.95

RELEASE

Out Now

PLAYERS

1 (1-32 online)

MINIMUM SPEC

Pentium II 233 MHz,
32Mb RAM, DirectX
7.0, 800Mb Hard Disk
space, Windows 95/98



The twists and turns of the development trail are many and varied but seldom to the extent of *Condition Zero*. Having gone

through no fewer than five developers and all manner of guises, the game has veered from single-player campaign (a rather ropey affair that now finds itself filed under 'Deleted Scenes') to official bot program and ends up lacking a real solo experience, offering little more than a series of bot matches with minor extra objectives tacked on. Perhaps this description doesn't do the game justice – the bots, a few hiccups aside, display impressive intelligence and actually act much like a human player in most situations.

Remarkably, the ageing *Half-Life* engine does a respectable job of hiding its age; good use of colour and clever level design give the game a

clean look, even if some of the modelling and texturing is a little primitive. Since this means that most current machines will happily run the game at a suitably silky rate, the game operates wonderfully online and is opened up to a wider audience than power-hungry titles like *Far Cry* or *Deus Ex: Invisible War*. Sound is one of the key areas of enhancement and the bots chatter away, for the most part keeping you informed about key objectives or the location of enemies. It's when they show a little character that they impress most, and to hear Morris yell 'Owned!' at a fallen terrorist really does create a sense of camaraderie.

Once again, *Counter-Strike* proves strangely tough to pin a score on – for what it is and on its own merits, it's the ultimate version of the world's best online game, period. However, we can't escape the fact that this is little more than *Counter-Strike 1.6* with decent bots – a game we've been playing for years and for free. As with any popular series, the fact that *Condition Zero* players will have access to more servers than 'old-school' gamers will twist many an arm into parting with some cash. The return on the investment will invariably be good – updated versions of old maps retain their quality and as more content becomes available this will really come into its own. As an offline training tool for the hectic world of network play and a stepping stone to bigger and better things, *Condition Zero* is a triumph, but as a standalone game it can't offer more than 'more of the same'. Which is no bad thing.

VERDICT 7/10
IF IT AIN'T BROKE...

■ As in the Xbox version, many of the weapons have been renamed since the golden days of *Counter-Strike*.

■ The mixture of fast-paced gameplay and realistic mortality is every bit as good today as it ever was.



COUNTER-STRIKE (XBOX)



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



RAINBOW SIX 3



■ Interacting with the locals is an important part of the game. They may help you out if you get stuck later.

games™ CONNECTED
EXPANDING THE GAMEPLAY
FRIEND OF FRIENDS: Linking up your GBA allows various elements from *A Wonderful Life* and *Friends Of Mineral Town* to be shared. The further you play in each title, the more you unlock.

HARVEST MOON: A WONDERFUL LIFE

THE CUBE BRINGS HARVEST MOON WONDERFULLY TO LIFE

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
GameCube
ORIGIN
Japan
PUBLISHER
Ubisoft
DEVELOPER
Natsume
PRICE
\$99.95
RELEASE
Out Now
PLAYERS
1

More animals, a vastly expanded catalogue of crops, and countless new gameplay elements – but should we welcome an enhanced version of Natsume's cheery farmyard RPG with open arms or is the enchanting simplicity of the *Harvest Moon* series under threat from this wealth of new features? Happily, the developer has done a wonderful job of sympathetically preserving the unique charm of previous instalments while evolving the concept into a wholesome offering that's worthy of the current generation.

The most immediately obvious difference ☐ between *Harvest Moon: A Wonderful Life* and its predecessors is in the visual department, where the game has made an incredibly successful transition into glorious 3D. This lavish graphical overhaul brings the quaint village of Forget-Me-Not and its quirky residents to life superbly and exudes a hypnotically tranquil ambience that epitomises the ideology of the series. Resplendently captured day/night cycles cast steadily creeping shadows and bathe the world in sumptuously moody lighting, while expanded attention to detail in the gradually changing seasons combines to take the game's immersive appeal to a whole new level.

Players are again invited to become absorbed ☐ by the leisurely pace of life in the village and are never under pressure to expand their list of daily chores beyond watering a handful of crops and tending a single cow. This delightfully therapeutic experience is inherently destined to



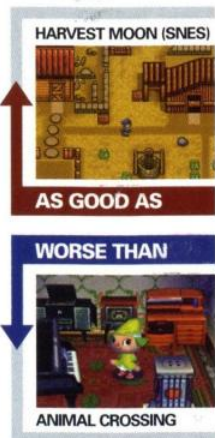
grow slightly dull after a while, but that's where the added depth comes into play. A wide range of opportunities are available to explore when you're ready to delve deeper into the game, yet they never complicate matters. The game is staged over 30 years and spans six chapters, constantly evolving the situation while introducing a steady stream of new elements to ensure farm life remains interesting. The concept can feel rather limited during excessive periods of play, but the spellbinding atmosphere and continuously evolving playing field will draw you into its enchanting clutches time and time again.

■ You can build a collection of animals if you like, though you'll start with just one cow and a pet dog or cat.



VERDICT 7/10

MAKES THE TRANSITION WITH ITS CHARM INTACT



■ Going from a brush to a dual-ended brush and onto a jackhammer is easier than you might think...



■ Make too many messy sentences and your ink will rapidly run out, hurting you towards game over. And you never thought neat handwriting was important...



DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED

PlayStation2

ORIGIN

Japan

PUBLISHER

SCEJ

DEVELOPER

Nana-On-Sha

PRICE

\$Variable (Import)

RELEASE

TBC (Japan: Out Now)

PLAYERS

1

YOU'RE LUCKY THIS PAGE ISN'T WRITTEN IN RHYME

MOJIB RIBON

With the world's quirkiest rhythm-action developer now turning its attention to some *Where's Wally*-esque nonsense with the forthcoming *Vib Ripple*, we figured it was high time we appreciated its previous work. Cue a mammoth *Parappa* session, a lot of *Um Jammer Lammy* and what can only be described as a hedonistic *Vib Ribbon* binge before arriving at *Mojib Ribon*. By this point we've been taught to drive by a moose, cooked burgers with a bearded ghost and danced along more lines than we can recall so we're ready for almost anything. Almost...

The concept for *Mojib* couldn't be simpler.
☐ Controlled entirely with one analog stick, ink-blob Mojiburi walks along circles of words, writing and rapping as he goes. You have to pull down the stick at the beginning of each phrase and

■ Miss the start of a pattern and Mojiburi will trip, spilling precious ink everywhere.



release it at the end. Simple enough, but in order to get sufficient ink on your brush a quick flick up is required before each down stroke. This is where much of the precision and difficulty lies – skimp on the ink and the sentence is scratchy, soaking the brush makes the text blotchy, and failing to release in time will leave a messy blob. As with *Vib Ribbon*, successive failures will result in de-evolution and you'll need some substantial skills to pull it back from the brink.

Perhaps the most depressing part of *Mojib*'s linguistic barrier is that it negates a large portion of the content. For instance, one of the better features allows players to email one another through PS2 Online with the recipient being able to play back the message as a series of raps – has there ever been a gentler way of leaving a lover than to do it through a rapping inkblot? But *Mojib* is not unplayable on import; basic play is so simple that anyone can pick up and enjoy this title. In fact, it may be the case that understanding the rhymes would ruin the game's charm – this would be devastating as the simple visuals and catchy tunes make this one of the most original and stylish games on the PS2. Even though *Vib Ribbon* made it to Australia, the phonetic nature of the speech synthesis and translation issues in *Mojib* will almost certainly rule out a PAL release. But fear not – while we'd urge everyone to witness *Mojib*'s beauty, it's too simple and repetitive to be an essential purchase.

VERDICT 6/10
 AN EXPERIENCE LIKE NO OTHER

games™

FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE
VOCALS: Mojiburi actually sings the text as he walks along the rings of words.
TRIO: Select from the boy, the girl or the robot to rap for you, each with their own voice.

BRITNEY'S DANCE BEAT



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



VIB RIBBON

A PARAGON PUBLICATION
NO.13 JUNE 2004

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RETRO

MICRO MAGAZINE

Thingy And The Doodahs

Is this forgotten game really
as strange as it sounds?

LEGEND OF THE MYSTICAL NINJA

Find out how real-life ninjas
influenced your favourite games

BBC MICRO
WAS THIS YOUR FIRST COMPUTER?
Go Supersonic with Sonic The Hedgehog
**WHAT WERE YOU
PLAYING IN 1994?**

PLUS!

SAM & MAX HIT THE
ROAD – THIS MONTH'S
CLASSIC RETRO GAME

RETRO NEWS

Find out what's going on in the here and now of retro gaming...

Street Fighter III Strikes Again

Capcom's 3rd Strike hits PlayStation2

Capcom has announced that a PS2 version of *Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike* will soon be released in Japan. Originally launched in coin-op form in 1999, the game wasn't the hit that Capcom wanted, but there was no disputing that it was a very beautiful and extremely playable product.

As one of just a handful of titles developed on the CPSIII arcade board, *SFIII: 3rd Strike* featured some of the finest 2D animation ever crafted for a videogame. Kicks and punches used many more frames than the earlier games in the series, and even minute details such as creases in clothes had been included. Because of this immense visual



▲ A bit of 3rd Strike can be yours in the comfort of your own home without faffing around with arcade boards.

splendour, the Dreamcast was the only console capable of running a translation at that time.

Why Capcom has waited until now to port the game to PS2 is anyone's

guess, though we have to admit that we're looking forward to pulling off Dragon Punches on a decent D-pad at last. There are also plans for a deluxe version, but details are scarce.

Long Live The King SNK unveils the first shots of KOF 3D

We first reported that SNK was developing a 3D *King Of Fighters* game back in issue 7, and at last we've received the first images of the game in action. Unfortunately, it seems that our worst fears have become reality – the game looks a lot more *Tekken* than *King Of Fighters*.

Twenty-four playable characters are set to be included, six of which are brand new to the series. So far only three of the new faces have

been revealed – Alba, Soiree and Lien – with Soiree looking almost indistinguishable from *Tekken*'s Eddy Gordo.

Veteran KOF players will be aware that *Tekken*'s button-bashing antics aren't particularly well suited to the usual *Street Fighter*-esque gameplay, so we're keeping our fingers crossed that SNK has found a better way to use the capoeira fighting style. We'll keep you updated.

A NES In the hand...

Nintendo Of America has confirmed that the Famicom SP will make its way stateside this summer under the name NES Game Boy Advance SP. Due to hit the shelves on 7 June, the hardware is set to launch with eight titles – *Donkey Kong*, *Pac-Man*, *The Legend Of Zelda*, *Super Mario Bros*, *Excite Bike*, *Ice Climber*, *Xenious* and *Bomberman* – priced at \$19.99 each. The machine itself is being styled to look like a NES controller, though we don't have a price for it yet.

With mobile gaming already branching into the realm of 3D and the recent unveiling of Sony's first PSP title, it's sometimes far too easy to get caught up in the latest fads and trends. While transition can be difficult for many industries, games are continuing to evolve for the better and it's something that we don't fear, but openly embrace. Even though we're as eager as you when it comes to absorbing the latest XNA development videos, or guessing exactly what Nintendo's new DS will actually look like, we never forget that nothing can have a future without first having a past.

Some gamers might scoff at the likes of *Donkey Kong*, *Pong* or *Pac-Man*, but a quick play reveals them to be just as good now as they ever were when we first played them. Still, that's not to say that retro games are vastly superior to their modern-day alternatives, but current technological advances wouldn't have come about if it wasn't for these early titles.

So as the front of this issue looks to the next generation of hardware and software, here in the retro section we're getting some guilty pleasure out of some classic ninja action and a detective dog...

Darran Jones, Retro Editor

This Month In 1994

This was the year that Wet Wet Wet hogged the top of the charts for three bloody months with Love Is All Around, and Nintendo chose cartridges over CDs...

GAMING NEWS MAY '94

Carry On Cartridges? Nintendo pulls a funny

It was exactly a decade ago that Nintendo confirmed that its upcoming console, codenamed Project Reality, would use cartridges rather than CDs. The decision had apparently been made because Nintendo wasn't confident that it could manufacture a piracy-free CD-ROM-based system, though sceptics suggested that it was merely an easy way for the company to control its third-party developers and charge higher prices for games.

Of course, the limited amount of memory available with the cartridge format meant that game designers had restrictions on the size of their creations. Furthermore, memory-intensive FMV sequences, like those

regularly seen on the PlayStation, were a luxury that few developers could afford to include. The problem ignited a feud between Nintendo and Squaresoft, and although Japan's premier RPG development house had once created titles exclusively for the SNES, it then chose to work predominantly on Sony's format.

It was also this year that Sony Computer Entertainment America was set up to deal with PlayStation projects Stateside. Set up a year before the US release of the machine, it was surprising that the best titles it could prepare in time for the launch were *NBA Jam* and *Mortal Kombat 3*. But ten years ago Sony wasn't in the position that it is today.



▲ Nintendo's cartridges – a cunning anti-piracy move, or a way of controlling third-party developers? Hmm...

Oz Charts in 1994

1. Love is all around
Wet Wet Wet
2. I Swear
All 4 One
3. Always
Bon Jovi
4. It's Alright
East 17
5. The Sign
Ace Of Base
6. Power of Love
Celine Dion
7. I'll Make Love to You
Boyz II Men
8. Please Forgive Me
Bryan Adams
9. Tomorrow
Silverchair
10. All For Love
Bryan Adams, Rod Stewart and Sting

Top movies in America, 1994

- Forrest Gump
\$329,691,196
- True Lies
\$146,261,000
- The Santa Clause
\$144,833,357
- The Flintstones
\$130,512,915
- Dumb & Dumber
\$127,175,354
- Clear And Present Danger
\$122,012,710
- Speed
\$121,226,560
- The Mask
\$119,938,730
- Pulp Fiction
\$107,930,000
- Interview With The Vampire
\$105,264,608

In the news today

Ayrton Senna Killed In F1 Accident

Tragedy struck this month in 1994 as Formula One champion Ayrton Senna was killed in a horrific accident at the San Marino Grand Prix in Italy. Senna, who was considered by many to be the best driver in the world, was travelling at 192mph when he lost control of his FW16 Formula One car and careered off the track and into a concrete wall.

An investigation revealed that a faulty steering column was the most likely cause of the accident, and three of the Williams-Renault team were charged with manslaughter as a

direct result of the fatal crash. All three were later acquitted.

Following the tragic event, Senna's body was flown back to his native Brazil where almost half a million mourners lined the streets of Sao Paulo to bid their farewells. Already a hero in Brazil, Senna's premature demise cemented his name as one of the country's best-loved exports.

Strangely, Austrian F1 driver Roland Ratzenberger had died in almost the exact same spot, known as the Tamburello curve, the day before Senna's fatal crash. Coincidence? Who knows...

S·O·N·I·C T·H·E H·E·D·G·E·H·O·G 2



Completing the frustratingly difficult special stages in *Sonic The Hedgehog* was the only way to collect all seven Chaos Emeralds and unlock the better ending. Great for completists and arguably the only true way to finish the game, yet it still seemed like scant reward for so much work. You could almost hear the collective groan of gamers everywhere as they hit the goal icon during the special stages by mistake and found themselves unceremoniously booted back to the game proper, postponing their quest for the perfect ending until they found another 50 Rings.

The Chaos Emeralds made a return in the sequel but, fortunately, the special stages were made easier for Sonic's second outing. Sonic and Tails would have to run along a half-pipe and collect a set number of Rings while avoiding bombs to get their hands on a Chaos Emerald. Yet again, it was the only way to see the proper ending but there was

another surprise in store for those who collected all seven Emeralds...

This time, collecting 50 Rings after obtaining all the Chaos Emeralds allowed you to turn into Super Sonic. Jump into the air and the spiky blue hedgehog would turn into his invincible, flashing yellow alter ego that could run and jump at twice Sonic's normal speed – although, to be precise, Super Sonic didn't run, instead preferring to glide along and destroy any Badniks in his path.

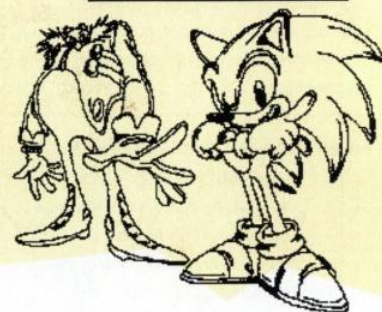
The number of Rings would become a timer, counting down to zero and returning Sonic back to his blue, vulnerable self once they had run out. But those few moments were enough to ensure Sonic players were checking every nook and cranny of each level to find as many Rings as possible, just for those precious extra seconds as Super Sonic.

As news spread of the existence of Super Sonic, Chaos Emeralds went from a minor bonus to a genuine reason for persevering with



Format: Mega Drive
Publisher: SEGA
Developer: SEGA
Release Date: 1992

the special stages. Gamers wanted to see Super Sonic for themselves and would often return to the game once they had beaten it, not for the proper ending but to experience Super Sonic for themselves. And what euphoria once they finally got to see the yellow hedgehog in action – yet another great retro gaming moment for those who did.



GAMES THAT TIME FORGOT...



THINGY AND THE DOODAHS

No, we haven't forgotten what its full title is and we certainly aren't making it up – this 1986

Spectrum title really is called *Thingy And The Doodahs*. Why? Good question. You've been told to collect

£60 and buy a computer from a second-hand shop, otherwise "ya mum 'un dad ull kill you".

To raise the cash, you have to search your house and collect pound coins as you go. Except, of course, the rooms in your house are rearranged in mazes and include locales such as forests to stretch the absurd concept as far as it can go. There are enemies in your house that have to be avoided too, although it's never explained what they're doing there to begin with.

Written by Michael Smith with a little help from "the family, Loon and Wally", it wasn't just the name that left a bad taste in the mouth. *Thingy*

And The Doodahs suffered from repetitive gameplay that was samey and uninteresting. Negotiate the maze, avoid the enemies, collect the coin – that's all there was to it, room after room until all 60 coins were collected. Add hideous graphics and terrible music and it's clear that more deliberation went into the title than the actual gameplay. Although, on second thoughts, we're not too sure that much thought went into that either. Perhaps the fact that this game has slipped into obscurity is because people would rather have bought any other game in the shop than look daft asking for *Thingy And The Doodahs*...



救出作戦目標 非戦闘員奪還



オペレーション ウルフ

OPERATION WOLF™

TAITO CORPORATION®

DESPITE BEING SPECIFICALLY DESIGNED FOR BRITISH SCHOOLS IN THE EIGHTIES, THE BBC B HAS A LOT MORE GAMING ABILITY THAN PEOPLE GIVE IT CREDIT FOR...

BBC MODEL B MICROCOMPUTER



If you're lucky enough to have been at school in the UK during the early to mid-Eighties, chances are you've used a BBC computer. As the machine of choice for educational establishments across the country throughout most of the decade that fashion forgot, the selection of software written specifically for the purpose of improving young minds was pretty comprehensive. But this isn't surprising given that the computer was conceived solely for such a purpose – all thanks to that great national institution, the British Broadcasting Corporation.

Having devised the BBC Computer Literacy Project in the early Eighties (a campaign to bring

Britain up to speed with the rapidly approaching technological revolution), the BBC decided that the best way to promote such a scheme was to feature computer demonstrations on a television show that everyone could watch. While coming up with such a show wasn't a problem (*The Computer Programme* began in 1981), finding a machine that could do everything the BBC wanted it to do wasn't.

Proton Power

After much debate, it was decided that the BBC should brand its own computer, and after drawing up specifications for such a machine it set about taking offers from various companies to produce it. After

ALMOST FAMOUS

With the BBC hardware intended to be used as a demonstration machine for BBC Education software, it quickly became a regular on a number of BBC TV shows. Appearances on *The Computer Programme*, *Micro Live*, *Computers In Control* and *Making The Most Of The Micro* ensured that people all over the country knew about the machine. However, its talents stretched further than education and soon the BBC B was appearing in the likes of *Tomorrow's World*, *Beat The Teacher*, *The Adventure Game* and even *Doctor Who*, where it was also used to provide many of the show's special effects. Radio 4 went as far as having a programme called *The Chip Shop*, which regularly broadcast software over the airwaves for people to record onto cassette and then run through their computers.

discussions with numerous firms (including Sir Clive Sinclair, who rather embarrassingly had his concept rejected), it was a small team from Acorn – the majority of whom were Cambridge students – that finally landed the contract with a computer dubbed the Proton.

Exceeding the BBC's specifications in every way, the group's hard work – which ran right up until the night before transmission to ensure that the machine worked properly – had clearly paid off. However, the original machine (the BBC A) was rather limited and it wasn't until Acorn upgraded the machine's capabilities with the BBC B by doubling the amount of RAM and adding functionality for a disk drive that it became the essential machine for schools everywhere.

BBC A-Okay

Of course, while the BBC reaped the benefits of the machine's educational prowess, the games front brought a new group of heroes to the fore – in particular,

JOYSTICK

Virtually all of the games and other utilities on the BBC used a keyboard set-up, but early analogue joysticks were also available if you wanted to really show off to your friends. Unfortunately, they weren't the most hard-wearing bits of kit...

"WHY I LOVE MY BBC"

As the first machine my parents ever bought me, it's only right for the BBC to still have a place in my heart. Not only did it help me learn (as was probably the reason I had it in the first place), but it started me on the road to loving games.

MARTIN M ATHERS

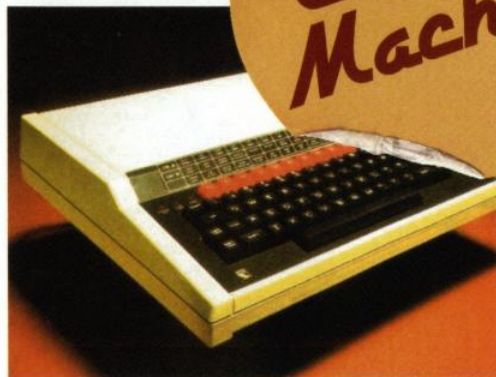


BIG BROTHER, LITTLE BROTHER

As was the norm for new technology, the BBC B was a relatively expensive piece of kit. Retailing originally at £399 (\$980), the price was justified by how much versatility the machine offered. However, it proved too much for some people, which prompted Acorn to release the Electron in 1983 – a cut-down version of the machine that lost some features, but sold at half the price. Thanks to the company's reputation, the machine performed well above expectations – so much so, in fact, that Acorn couldn't cope with demand and subsequently lost out on a lot of sales. Two

years later and things swung the other way thanks to improvements in technology that left the older BBC B some way behind the current standard. At this point Acorn introduced the BBC Master, which swiftly took over from the BBC B in terms of functionality – with better graphics modes and a variety of advanced features it was far superior to the original machine. Though it still enjoyed a strong uptake in schools, the computer's popularity on the home market was already waning, especially after the surge in competing machines like the ZX Spectrum and Atari ST.

Classic Machine

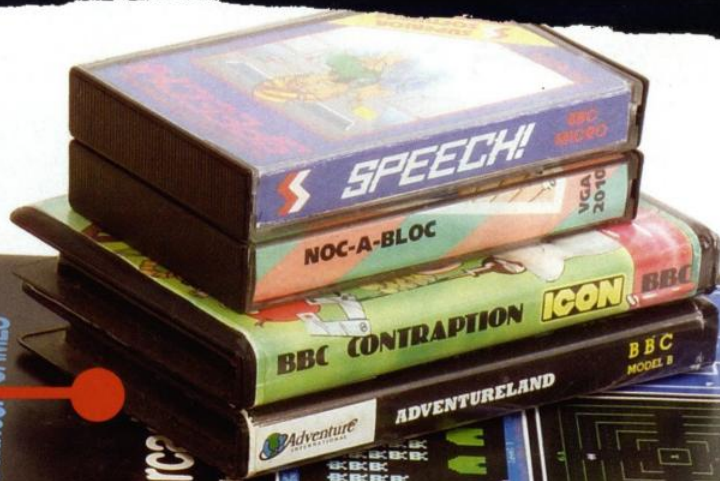


Superior Software (which reigned supreme as the developer of choice for much of the BBC's life), Acornsoft and Program Power, which later became Micro Power. Between the three of them (as well as a number of other less successful companies) a remarkable number of games were released that allowed the BBC to be a worthy competitor in the burgeoning home computing

market, and by the end of the machine's life over a million units had been sold across the country – far beyond the 12,000 sales predicted by Acorn.

GAMES

While the BBC initially made use of the old-school cassette method of loading, the more advanced users bought themselves disc drives. The drive ran huge 5.25-inch floppy discs that actually were floppy and whose boxes were twice as big.



Arcade Action

ACORNsoft



SPECIFICATIONS

CPU: 2A 8-bit processor
CPU SPEED: 2MHz
MEMORY: 32Kb RAM, 32Kb in two 16Kb ROMs containing MOS and BASIC
RESOLUTION: Between 160x256 and 640x256, dependant on mode
COLOURS: Up to 16 (eight in two intensities), dependant on mode
SOUND: Three-channel, with one white-noise generator
STORAGE: Tape or 5.25-inch floppy disk
INPUT/OUTPUT: 1MHz expansion bus connector, additional processor port, user port, ZIF ROM socket connector, three DIP ROM sockets, parallel printer port, disk drive port, RS423 port, analogue joystick port, tape interface

Classic Machine





SIX OF THE BEST



JUST AN EDUCATIONAL COMPUTER? WE BEG TO DIFFER. SOME OF OUR EARLIEST GAMING MEMORIES WERE THANKS TO ACORN'S GROUND-BREAKING MACHINE...

Codename: Droid

Developer: Superior Software
Year: 1987

Co-created by *Driver's* Martin Edmondson, *Codename Droid* was the hugely improved sequel to *Stryker's Run*, a game that won many fans for its simple yet addictive gameplay. Whereas *Stryker's Run*

consisted of a single (but incredibly long) horizontal scrolling level, *Codename Droid* was more of a platform adventure and allowed you to explore a remarkably large planet with multiple levels. It had the same level of difficulty as its predecessor, which meant that completing it was tough.



Repton

Developer: Superior Software
Year: 1984

It might have started out as an obvious clone of *Boulder Dash*, but *Repton* went on to be so much more. With the aim being to collect the valuable diamonds and avoid death (that came through falling boulders,

insanely fast monsters or just sheer stupidity), the game's simplicity made it horribly addictive. But it wasn't until the third instalment in the series appeared – complete with a level designer that led to sequels such as *Life Of Repton* and *Repton Thru Time* – that it found its own identity.

Granny's Garden

Developer: 4Mation
Year: 1983

Perhaps not one of the best BBC games ever made, but certainly one of the most memorable – there aren't many people around who used a BBC at school and didn't play *Granny's Garden*. Setting you the task of saving

the six children of the captured king and queen, it featured some of the most bizarre logic for an educational game ever, and puzzles that were more about trial and error than skill. Of course, that doesn't mean we don't love it, even though we still can't finish it today without cheating.



Chuckie Egg

Developer: A&F Software
Year: 1983

Appearing among the first wave of platform games, *Chuckie Egg* stands out because of its addictiveness and never-ending gameplay. The concept of collecting golden eggs without dropping off the screen or

being killed by the marauding turkeys was fun, but the real hook was that if you died you knew it was entirely your fault rather than the game being unfair. A sequel followed, but the sacrifice of gameplay for improved visuals and sound meant that it was largely forgotten in favour of its predecessor.



Elite

Developer: Acornsoft
Year: 1984

We couldn't list the greatest titles on the BBC without mentioning *Elite* – possibly one of the most revered games ever made. The game's capacity for free-roaming exploration and completely open-ended structure was something no-one had ever attempted to do with a videogame before and, as such, *Elite* rewrote the rules for games at the time. Superior Software (which went on to buy out Acornsoft) released an enhanced version of *Elite* for the BBC Master in 1986, before the game was ported to practically every other format.

Ghouls

Developer: Micro Power
Year: 1983

Along with *Castle Quest*, *Ghouls* rates as one of the better games produced by Micro Power, despite being tougher than old boots. Platform games were always hard in those days but whereas *Chuckie Egg* eased you in before making it tricky, *Ghouls* was just plain nasty – you were doing well if you made it past Level 3. Even worse, you only had to climb from the bottom of each level to the top (avoiding the ghosts, spikes and other devious traps along the way). Needless to say, much cursing was to be had here.



BARBARIAN II

THE DUNGEON OF DRAX



Spectrum Version



Amiga Version



C64 Version



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In case of difficulty, available by mail order
from: Palace Software, The Old Forge,
7 Caledonian Road, London N1 9DX.
Send cheque or postal order for £9.99

PALACE

(C64, Spectrum, Amstrad cassette), £12.99
(C64 disk), £14.99 (ST, Amstrad, Spectrum
disk), £19.99 (Amiga) plus 80p P&P. Access
and Visa holders telephone 01-278 0751.
Subject to availability.

Classic
Feature

LEGEND OF MYSTICAL

You may be intrigued by ninjas, but how much do you really know?

THERE'S A FASCINATION that surrounds ninjas. Due to the secretive nature of these seemingly ruthless assassins, it's almost impossible to separate fact from fiction, though documents exist mapping a clear history of a discipline that blends religion, nature and violence. For most of us, of course, the idea of a ninja has been

shaped by the media – from movies to games, the classic image is often of a nimble, athletic figure, shrouded in black and darting across rooftops, invisible against the night sky. And that portrayal is accurate to an extent, but like so many other things, there's a lot more to being a ninja than meets the eye...

It's impossible to know the exact date when the first ninja was born,

though ancient Chinese manuscripts refer to a group known as Lin Kuei, which roughly translates as Forest Demons. Set up as a secret society dedicated to protecting its people, the Lin Kuei form of combat was taught to Korea's Hwarang warriors, before reaching Japan in around 715AD. According to scriptures, a lone Lin Kuei ninja named En no Gyoja (or En no Ubasoku, depending on what you read) passed on the knowledge to groups of families living in rural mountain villages. And so the legend of the mystical ninja was born.

Over the next few centuries, the practice of ninjutsu became more widespread and evolved to incorporate a wider range of elements, including philosophy, Buddhism and, probably most importantly of all, the Japanese religion of Shinto. In Shinto, it's

believed that there are many spiritual realms, including the Earth itself, and that all paths will eventually lead to the same destination. Because of this idea that we all end up in the same place, ninjas accepted every belief system, were able to defer to other religions, or simply work elements from other religions into their own unique belief system. This progressive form of the Japanese ninja became known as the Shinobi.

By the late 15th Century, ninjutsu was a way of life in Japan, and clans practising varying forms of the discipline were cropping up all around the Far East. Among some of the most famous ninjas during this period were Yagyu Jubei and his master Hattori Hanzo – two names featured in SNK's *Samurai Shodown*. Both were key figures in epic Japanese battles, though it



▲ SNK's *Ninja Masters* may have only been an average game, but at least the environments were fairly authentic.

▼ Although it focused on sword fighting, the *Samurai Shodown* series featured real ninjas from the history books.



NINJA

▼ SEGA's *Shinobi* is one of the most famous ninja videogames ever made. *Shinobi* was the name given to ninjas in Japan.



was their acquaintance, Ishikawa Goemon, whose demise was one of the most selfless acts in ninja lore.

Known as a legendary bandit hero, Goemon was famous for stealing from the rich and giving to the poor, though his final battle would cement his name in Japanese history books for a different reason. A feared warlord named Toyotomi Hideyoshi had been at war with Goemon's clan, and had slaughtered his wife and kidnapped his son, Gobei. To make matters worse, Hideyoshi-san had since become shogun (ruler of Japan). This infuriated the grieving Goemon. Intent on putting an end to Hideyoshi's rule and rescuing his son, Goemon set out in the dead of night and infiltrated Hideyoshi's castle. He located the target and

was about to assassinate him when he was discovered and captured.

His fate was to be boiled alive in oil along with his son, and although he was aware that the end was nigh, Goemon knew he had to do everything to save his Gobei. Raising his arms above his head, the legendary bandit hero managed to hold the child above the surface of the scalding fat and away from harm. Meanwhile, Hattori Hanzo and his band of fellow ninjas had entered the castle. Although it was too late for Goemon by the time they found him, they arrived in time to save his son. A touching story, we're sure you'll agree, and one that's a million miles away from Konami's quirky *Goemon* games.

However, while Konami's interpretation of the ninja lifestyle is

“Many people believed ninjas had magical powers, including the ability to make themselves invisible”

Ninjutsu Ingredients

Put all the elements from real-life ninjas into a videogame, and what do you get?



Stealth

Being able to move about undetected is pivotal to a ninja's survival. Well, it worked for Solid Snake on *Metal Gear Solid*, and now everyone's got the sneaky bug.



Farming

Far from the usual ninja image, most would have spent their days farming. Very much like in *Harvest Moon*, actually. Though *Harvest Moon* avoids the killing...



Weapons

Ninjas would have been fluent in a range of combat styles. Pretty much every weapon in *Soul Blade* would have been used at some point to dish out some hurt.



Battles

Protecting your homestead came with its perils. Most ninja clans would have seen *Dynasty Warriors*-style battles from time to time. But perhaps with fewer sequels.

The Perfect Ninja Game

Super Harvest Blade Warriors Online

As strange as it might sound, *Super Harvest Blade Warriors Online* would probably be the ultimate ninja game. Playing as part of a clan, you would be required to protect your homestead from other clans, grow food to eat, practise your martial arts and even train your fellow players in new techniques. Now we just need someone to develop it...

about as surreal as they come, others are a lot more true to life. SEGA's *Shinobi*, for example, sticks closely to the activities of real ninjas that have been documented, right down to the scenery, native architecture, and selection of weaponry. But while swords and

throwing stars are the most common types of weapons associated with ninja imagery, the range of blades and batons was actually a lot more diverse. Sickles, foot spikes and even bare hands were just as deadly as knives and nunchakus when used correctly.

Contrary to popular belief, though, ninjas weren't all vicious assassins – most were simply quiet country folk who used what they'd learned to protect their families and homesteads. And because ninjas were often swift and stealthy in their encounters, armoured warriors

wouldn't always have time to defend themselves, resulting in many believing that ninjas had magical powers, including the ability to turn invisible. Naturally, the ninjas played along with this misconception, which in turn made their enemies more afraid of them.

Ninja Weapons And Techniques

While swords, nunchakus, knives and throwing stars tend to be the weapons most associated with ninjas, the range was

actually far broader in real life. Not only that, but each weapon required specific training if it was to be used properly. There were, of course,

techniques that didn't rely on any sort of weapon at all, instead using just the bare hands to immobilise the enemy.



Toh-jutsu
(Art of the sword)
This would have incorporated a range of blades, some one-handed, others needing two.



Shurikenjutsu
(Art of throwing weapons)
This would have included various projectiles such as stars, knives and darts.



Bojutsu/Jojutsu
(Art of staff and stick)
This would have included mostly wooden weapons of various shapes and sizes.



Kusari-jutsu
(Art of sickle crescent and a chain)
This included some of the trickiest weapons to use, such as scythes, chains and nunchakus.



Sojutsu
(Art of the spear)
Perhaps not the most obvious ninja weapon, spears would have been barbed for extra damage.



Taijutsu
(Art of unarmed combat)
Even when ninjas were seemingly unarmed, they would often have had hand claws or foot spikes hidden from view.



Mikkyo
(Art of medicine)
Clans would have each had secret recipes for creating their own potions and poisons.



Intonjutsu
(Art of stealth)
Trainee ninjas would have been taught to move silently, while children were taught to dislocate their limbs.

Deadly

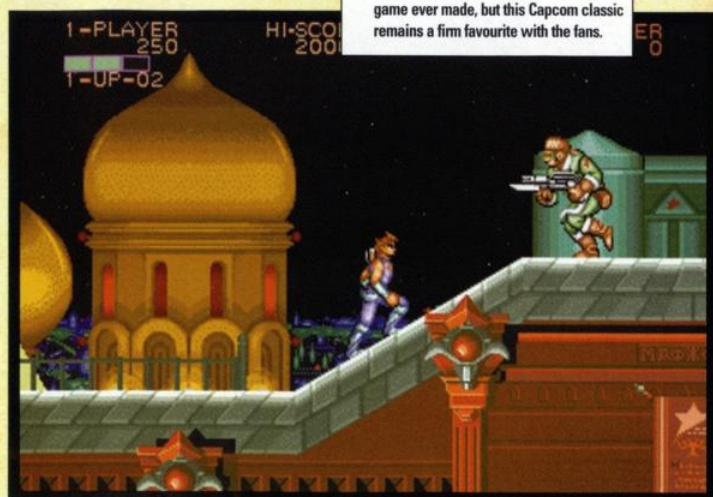
There were, however, a few genuine 'tricks' that ninjas had at their disposal. Many were taught to dislocate their limbs from a young age, helping them to escape if captured, while others would hack off their own limbs to free themselves rather than reveal their secrets to the enemy. But for all the individualities that different clans had, all were agreed on one simple belief – that they should always practise Toh Shin Do, which meant 'way of the pure-hearted sword'.

Many people aren't aware of how beautifully organic the Shinto religion is, or how many ninjas had a true appreciation for nature. Instead, the focus tends to be on all these violent weapons and dislocated limbs – subjects that don't make for good family viewing. Over the years, movie directors and game developers have had to adhere to strict guidelines regarding what imagery can be shown; since the Seventies, for example, nunchakus have sometimes been a touchy subject. These guidelines have since been relaxed, though, and nunchakus are once again appearing on the silver screen.

Where animated ninjas are concerned, on the other hand, the use of nunchakus has always been an even greyer area. Certainly, many early anime movies featuring them were edited, though similar imagery in videogames has often managed to slip through the net. Sculptured Software's *Ninja* on C64, released in 1986, featured nunchakus on the title screen and box art, for instance, while Konami's *Turtles* games included Michelangelo's nunchakus uncut in any way.

More recently, Tecmo's *Ninja Gaiden* for the Xbox has proved that the censors have become even more relaxed, though rumour has it that the European release won't feature any of the bloody decapitations seen in the import game.

▼ *Strider* wasn't the most realistic ninja game ever made, but this Capcom classic remains a firm favourite with the fans.



Legends

It seems, then, that although the videogame interpretation of the ninja, including the weaponry and combat, is slowly getting closer to how real ninjas would have appeared, there's still a lot to be learned when it comes to lifestyle and religion. Working as part of a ninja team in a mission-based online game could certainly offer the sort of experience fairly close to the life of a real ninja. Just imagine having to protect your homestead from a rival clan of online gamers, each displaying their own unique range of ninja moves – moves that gamers had developed and taught to one another. Of course, if a game were to truly represent the life of a ninja, you'd probably spend much of your time farming. So perhaps something like *Harvest Moon* would be more in order, though whether it would have the same appeal is another matter...



▲ Huge fireballs may not be particularly realistic, but many people believed ninjas had such mysterious powers.

Digital Ninjas

We look at the attributes of four of our favourite videogame ninjas.

Name: Sho Musashi
Game: Shinobi X
Format: Saturn

Charisma: 7 – Sho looks great and he's out to save his sister. The perfect gentleman.

Agility: 7 – He has the ability to jump and flip, and he can hang onto branches.

Stealth: 6 – He's not particularly well camouflaged, but he's very nimble.

Weapons: 6 – His standard weapon is a sword, though he also has throwing stars.



Magic: 6 – Mystical gods can be summoned, making Sho's moves extra powerful.

Authenticity: 6 – He certainly looks the part, though his clothes are more vibrant than a real ninja.

Name: Strider
Game: Strider
Format: Multi

Charisma: 7 – Larger than life and dressed in blue and red, Strider is memorable at the very least.

Agility: 8 – Able to scale walls and leap enormous gaps, he's certainly very nimble.

Stealth: 4 – Strider isn't really about stealth – he's far too feisty for that.

Weapons: 3 – Armed only with his sword, Strider isn't a particularly



versatile character,

Magic: 0 – Strider is all about combat – magic doesn't even come into it.

Authenticity: 4 – Strider is far too colourful to be a real ninja, though he certainly gives it a good go.

Name: Ryu
Game: Ninja Gaiden (Dead Or Alive)
Format: Multi

Charisma: 5 – Ryu is a man of mystery, and also extremely stylish.

Agility: 9 – He's become more nimble as the years have gone on. He can even run up walls.

Stealth: 6 – Ryu's speed means that he can still take foes by surprise.

Weapons: 10 – With a huge arsenal of weapons, Ryu is certainly a



versatile fighter.

Magic: 8 – Ryu is capable of various magic spells, though few are that impressive.

Authenticity: He looks sleek, but his costume is a little too well fitting.

Name: Goemon
Game: Legend Of The Mystical Ninja
Format: SNES

Charisma: 10 – Goemon is so popular that he's got a whole army of friends to help him out.

Agility: 7 – Not the most nimble of ninjas, but he'll have a go.

Stealth: 4 – He's hardly stealthy, but many of his enemies are too stupid to notice him anyway.

Weapons: 8 – Goemon has a weapon suited to every situation.



Magic: 7 – Goemon lives in a land filled with dragons and mythical creatures – magic is all around.

Authenticity: 6 – He may not look like a real ninja, but Goemon is based on a real-life hero.

CUTESY

Ninja family free



NINJA



■ C64
■ 1984
■ As a text adventure, this early offering gave players the opportunity to see life through the eyes of a ninja. It was obviously limited due to the technology of the time, but still enjoyable and fairly atmospheric.

THE NINJA



■ Master System
■ 1986
■ Despite its more realistic visuals, *The Ninja's* gameplay was almost identical to *Ninja*. It was developed by SEGA a year earlier, so it was simpler to play, both action buttons fired darts at your sneaky enemies.

NINJA



■ C64
■ 1986
■ A little more like some of the later 1986 releases of *Ninja* on the C64 gave players the opportunity to beat up waves of thugs. Simple in its execution, the game limited at what was to come.

Even though the ancient art of ninjutsu is often shrouded in secrecy, this deadly form of combat has been depicted in videogames for the last 20 years. Often frowned upon by the censors, there's something thrilling about the thought of being a silent assassin, slipping over rooftops in the dead of night...

ANIMALS

NINJA HAMSTER



■ C64
■ 1987
■ Much like the SNES and Mega Drive game *Brat Paws Of Fury*, *Ninja Hamster* was a one-on-one beat-'em-up in which you had to go up against all sorts of hilarious animals. Well, the developers thought it was a good idea.

SHINOBI



■ Arcade
■ 1987
■ One of the best known ninja games ever, *Shinobi* blended combat and platform action perfectly. Although it started off in the arcade, numerous follow-ups were released across a range of formats.

THE NINJA WARRIORS



■ Arcade
■ 1987
■ Though much like any other scrolling beat-'em-up, this was unique that it used three screens rather than one. What this meant was that you could see enemies approaching from further away than other similar titles.

THE LAST NINJA (SERIES)



■ Multi
■ 1987
■ Thanks to System 3's brilliant design, *The Last Ninja* sold over two million copies worldwide. What was interesting was that the company responsible was British, yet Japanese culture had been captured perfectly.

NINJA KID



■ NES
■ 1988
■ Cutesy and minimalist, this fun little NES game was a basic action platformer in which the objective was simply to work your way through a number of themed shrines. Hardly a classic, but fun all the same.

REVENGE OF SHINOBI



■ Mega Drive
■ 1988
■ Following on from the arcade release of *Shinobi*, this Mega Drive-exclusive title lacked the ingenuity of its predecessor. Gameplay was speedy and responsive, but many found the game to be a little too difficult.

NINJA GAIDEN



■ Arcade
■ 1988
■ Not massively different from *Shinobi* as far as gameplay went, Tecmo's *Ninja Gaiden* stood out because of its lush visuals. Two follow-ups were later developed and ported across to the NES.

NINJA MASSACRE



■ C64
■ 1988
■ Not to be mixed up with the fictitious *Ninja Massacre*, *Ninja Massacre* was almost identical to *Gauntlet*. The main difference was that all the wizards and suchlike had been replaced with ninjas. But that was obvious really.

STRIDER



■ Arcade
■ 1989
■ Capcom's answer to *Shinobi*, and a superb game in its own right. With a bold and vibrant visual style and tidy gameplay, *Strider* has become a cult classic and is a game that all hardcore gamers should play.

NINJA COMBAT



■ Arcade
■ 1990
■ Hardly the most authentic ninja game ever created, *Ninja Combat* was a typical Neo-Geo action game in which huge, colourful enemies were destroyed with a flurry of over-the-top special moves.

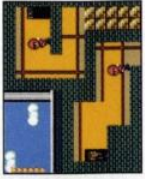
ONE ON ONE

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES (SERIES)



■ Arcade
■ 1989
■ Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles were famously renamed Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles in the UK, and thanks to Konami a number of games were released that starred the fighting amphibians. The first was this four-player arcade game.

ALEX KIDD IN SHINOBI WORLD



■ Master System
■ 1990
■ Alex Kidd was the Master System's answer to Mario and a number of games were released in the series, each with a different theme. This one featured ninjas and had a decidedly Eastern atmosphere, right down to the cutesy assassins.

Predictably, much of the splendour was lost in the translation, but the overall results were satisfactory.

locate the missing Cavebabes. The follow-up saw the main characters transformed into monkeys

Japan. This cutesy series has a cult following, though few of the games have made it out of Japan.

games the imagery was largely
colours sickeningly garish.

enough to the real thing to get b
featured additional ninjas in mar

realistically portrayed many fight
ninja-favourite ninjutsu.

extremely playable, though, the didn't really take advantage of the

those in *Mortal Kombat*. It also r
Saturn's sprite-manipulation tec

character himself wore a ninja mask and flitted about in a very nimble way.

infamously wobbly bosoms and
Ninia Gaiden.

Samurai Shodown, this lacked s

sword-wielding warriors before opportunity to slit your throat

were a bit disappointing really. I
fun to play.

messy deaths, and fans were pleased that the beautiful orchestral score was just as spectacular.

scenery. Here, however, the characters had a comedy Eastern flavour to them.

you can play against other Xbox

other games. And as it's running

PlayStation2 game, though Nigh

AD&P owners the opportunity to partake in a little stealth ninja action. What's more, it can be played online.

ninja, progression revolves around traditional platform elements and enjoyable puzzles

SAM & MAX

HIT the ROAD

FORGET PIRATES OR EVIL TENTACLES – LUCASARTS' FINEST HOUR STARRED A WISECRACKING DOG AND A PSYCHOPATHIC RABBIT. HONESTLY...

Publisher: LucasArts
Developer: LucasArts
Release: 1993
Format: PC

With games like *Maniac Mansion*, *Zak McKracken And The Alien Mindbenders* and *The Secret Of Monkey Island* already proving huge successes with PC gamers in the late Eighties and early Nineties, it was clear to LucasArts that point-and-click adventures were a big thing. This may have had something to do with the revolutionary new process (for the time) that the company had taken to using for its adventure games. Created to power the original *Maniac Mansion*, the SCUMM (Script Creation Utility for *Maniac Mansion*) engine was initially programmed by Lucasfilm Games' employees Ron Gilbert and

Aric Wilmunder after Gilbert decided he'd had enough of adventure games that had user-unfriendly environments and made dying repeatedly part of the process of solving puzzles.

SCUMM got around this by allowing gamers to build their own sentences using a graphical interface, rather than having to type things and hope the game understood; verbs (provided by the game's word interface) and nouns (items in the player's inventory or near them on screen) could be combined to try virtually anything, without causing hair-pulling frustration.

While the technology was slowly improving, LucasArts decided it also needed some fresh blood to create characters worthy of becoming the stars of its adventures. Having already produced two *Monkey Island* games and with *Day Of The Tentacle* updating the *Maniac Mansion* licence, it was time for some new ideas, and for that LucasArts looked within its own ranks. Enter Steve



▲ Most of the characters you'll meet are helpful in a cryptic sort of way if you ply them with enough candy.

Purcell – animator on a number of projects for LucasArts and the man behind a pair of cult comic book characters called Sam and Max. Purcell had masterminded the adventures of Sam (a smart-talking dog detective in a suit) and Max (his three-foot-high hyperactive and slightly sociopathic rabbit sidekick) since 1987 when their first 32-page comic appeared, although the man himself admits to pinching the original characters from his younger brother during childhood.

Thanks to a combination of slapstick humour, bizarre antics and inadvertent crime-solving, Sam and Max hit people's funny bones, but it was only through a chance invitation to create an original comic strip for a LucasArts newsletter that Purcell's creations were let into the Lucas fold. Parodies of *Star Wars*, *Indiana Jones* and other classic LucasArts games followed, which no doubt helped to seal the deal when the time came for the idea of a game based on the troublesome twosome.



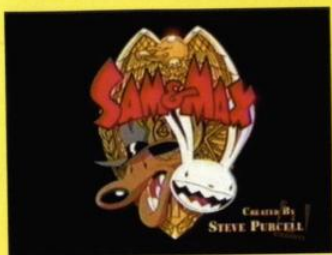
▲ Max has plenty of deep-seated psychopathic tendencies – he just loves pounding on virtually anyone.



▲ Sam's overly cynical view of the world makes an appearance more than once during your adventure...

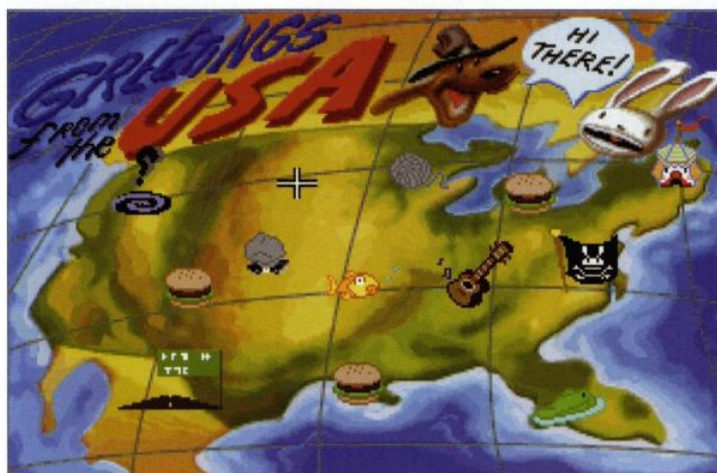
MADE FOR TELEVISION

Sam & Max Hit The Road wasn't the only way in which the crime-fighting pair managed to make their mark outside of the world of comic books. Late in 1997, a Canadian animation company called Nelvana produced a 13-episode series of *Sam And Max: Freelance Police* featuring the duo's adventures. The pair visited a restaurant run by aliens, misused a wristwatch capable of time travel, fought an arch nemesis called Mack Salmon – all with the help of The Geek, a teenage genius who lived in their basement. While the cartoon was both strange and hilarious, Fox cancelled it after just one run. However, it can still be found on video (NTSC only, sadly), and clips from the series are lurking on the internet.



And so *Sam & Max Hit The Road* was born. Working closely with the directing and producing talents of Sean Clarke and Mike Stemmle, Purcell's twisted humour was turned into a hugely popular point-and-click adventure. The game saw everyone's favourite freelance police officers take on the case of Bruno the Bigfoot, who has gone missing from the local carnival and appears to have taken the show's next-best freak, Trixie the Giraffe-Necked Girl, with him.

Tracking down the pair takes Sam and Max to plenty of strange locations all over America including the World's Largest Ball Of Twine, the Mystery Vortex, Bumpusville (home of renowned country and western singer Conrad Bumpus) and many more besides. However, it was the way that the game managed to capture the madcap style of the comic book while maintaining the point-and-click stylings of previous LucasArts adventures that made *Hit The Road* so popular with fans of both games and comics – rarely has a game featured so many laugh-out-



loud moments without becoming stale or repetitive.

The game also heralded an improvement in the ageing SCUMM engine. Originally using simple text to show the player's verb options and inventory, the engine had improved through games like *Monkey Island* and *Day Of The Tentacle* to move into visual representations for items that the player had to hand – however, the verb menu remained in text form. In *Hit The Road*, though, LucasArts evolved the engine into a completely visual-driven form by introducing a cycling verb icon; actions like Use, Look At, Talk To, Walk To and Pick Up were changed into visual representations and combined into a single pointer, which could be changed simply by hitting the right mouse button. It might have been a minor tweak, but it made playing *Hit The Road* much easier – something that you'd be thankful for if you'd ever experienced the game's incredibly twisted logic.

Sadly, if you've been looking

forward to any more gaming adventures with Sam and Max, you're going to have a long wait. Despite being longed for by many gamers, development of the promised sequel – *Sam & Max: Freelance Police* – has been cancelled by LucasArts. "After careful evaluation of current

WOT NO SEQUEL?

With the news that LucasArts has canned the upcoming sequel to *Hit The Road*, it should come as no surprise that dedicated fans are in uproar. Petitions have sprung up all over the internet and emails of complaint have been pouring into LucasArts' mailbox. According to the unofficial Sam and Max fan website (www.samandmax.net), the duo's creator, Steve Purcell, isn't exactly happy about the decision either. "I'm extremely frustrated and disappointed," he said, "especially for the team who have devoted so much effort and creativity to Sam and Max. It's a shame to think that their accomplishments, as well as the goodwill that has been growing in the gaming press toward this project, will all go to waste due to this short-sighted decision." You know, we couldn't have put it better ourselves...

marketplace realities and underlying economic considerations, we've decided that this was not the appropriate time to launch a graphic adventure on the PC," said Mike Nelson, acting general manager and VP of finance and operations at LucasArts. Fair enough, you might think, but then if the alternative is the continued milking of the *Star Wars* licence until the end of time, we know which one we'd rather have. We reckon there's still life in the old dog (and rabbit) yet.

Presentation:

95%

A hilarious rollercoaster ride from beginning to end

Graphics

92%

The crazy world of Sam and Max never looked so good

Sound

93%

The voiceover on the CD version serves to make things better

Gameplay

91%

Twisted comedy, but with twisted puzzles too – very tricky

Lifespan

88%

If you can work out the brain-bending puzzles, it's over too quickly

OVERALL

94%

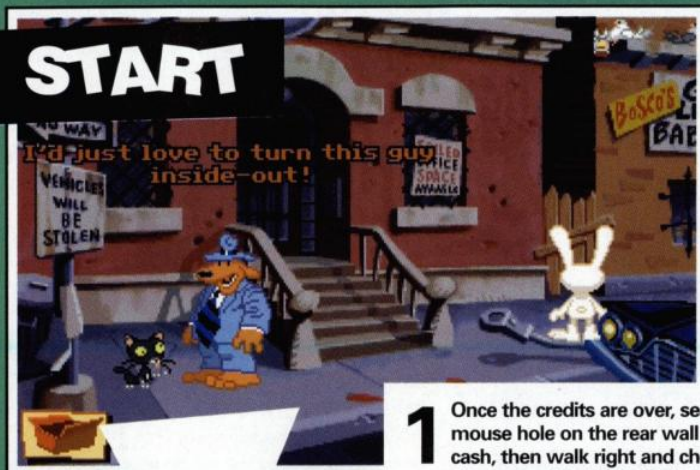
RETRO

Step-By-Step

Sam & Max Hit The Road

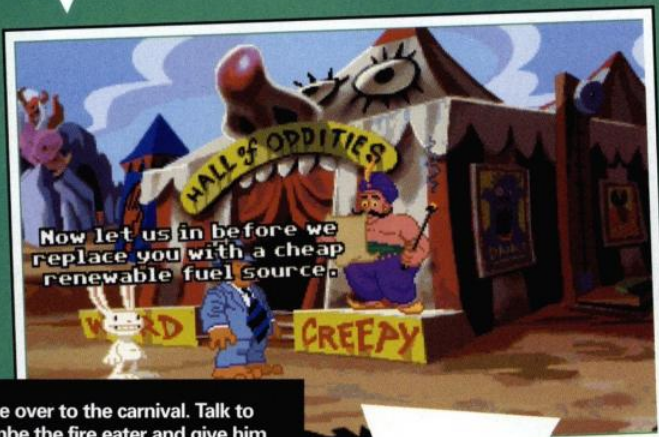
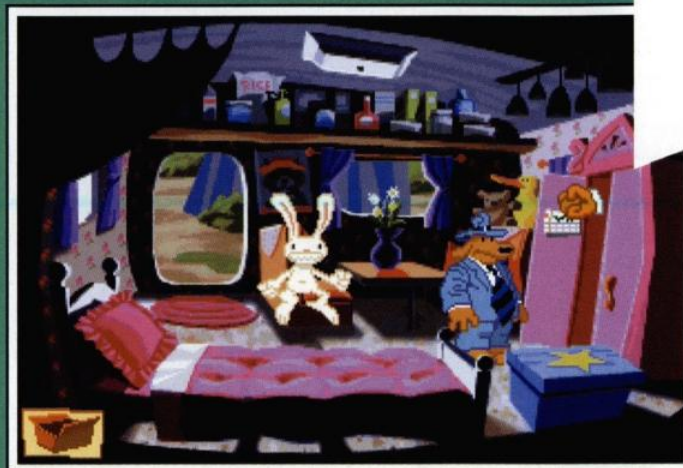
The logic behind many of LucasArts' point-and-click adventures was always rather twisted, but *Sam & Max Hit The Road* took things to an entirely new level. Some of the things you need to do are just crazy...

START



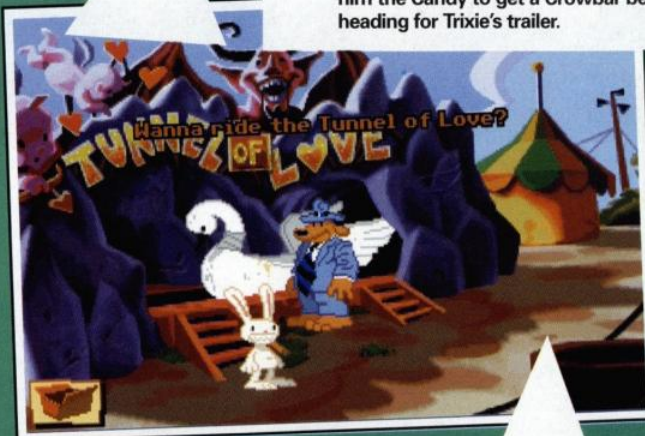
1 Once the credits are over, search the mouse hole on the rear wall for some cash, then walk right and check the closet for a Blacklight Bulb. Leave your office and head out onto the street (pushing the man off the balcony on the way), allowing Max to 'interrogate' the stray cat to get your orders.

6 Break in with the Crowbar and grab the costume from the chest, as well as the Golf Scorecard from the closet. Leave and drive to the World's Largest Ball Of Twine – use the tram to get to the restaurant, then talk to the strange man to get a Bent Spanner before leaving again.



2 Drive over to the carnival. Talk to Flambe the fire eater and give him your orders, then enter the tent and chat to Shep and Burl to learn about the case – Bruno the Sasquatch has escaped! Grab the Sasquatch Hair from the floor and the Hand in a jar on the pedestal before using the exit on the right.

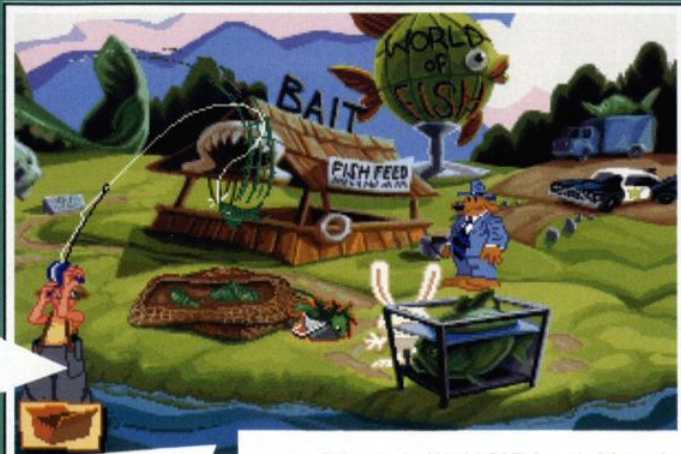
5 Back at the carnival, ride the Tunnel Of Love and use the Flashlight to reveal a Fuse Box. Use Max on it to stop the ride, then check out the Dummy on the right to open a door. Go through and meet Doug, asking him about Bruno – give him the Candy to get a Crowbar before heading for Trixie's trailer.



3 Play the Wak-A-Rat game and win to get the Flashlight – combine this with the Blacklight Bulb. Grab the nearby Fishbowl Lens, then ride the Cone Of Tragedy. Check your inventory and talk to the man to get a Claim Ticket. Take this over to the Lost And Found to get all your stuff back again.



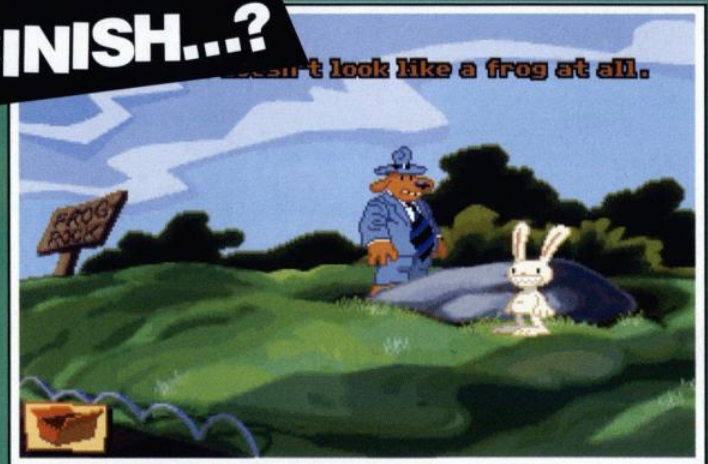
4 Jump in your car and drive to Snuckey's. Go inside and grab some Candy from the shelf, then ask the clerk to open your jar for you. When Max needs the toilet, get the Key from the clerk and follow Max outside – pick up the cup and talk to Max when he returns to get the Key Rasp.



- 7** Drive to the World Of Fish and pick up the bucket by the bait hut, then use the Spanner on the giant plastic fish and jump inside to return to the World's Largest Ball Of Twine. Use Max on the loose piece of string before the chef comes back, then drive over to the Gator Golf Emporium.

- 12** Go to Frog Rock and use the three pieces of Sasquatch Hair on the rock, then sprinkle it with Mystic Mole Powder to reveal Bumpusville on your map. This is where the rather nasty Elvis-a-like Conroy is holding Bruno and Trixie captive, but saving them isn't going to be easy... Did you really think it would be?

FINISH...?



- 11** Go to the World's Largest Ball Of Twine again and head for the restaurant. Use the Loose Wires with the Binoculars, then the Fishbowl Lens, before looking through them – find Frog Rock that Shuv-Oohl mentioned by moving the Binoculars left and right before going back to the car.



- 8** Pick up the broken Golf Ball Retriever by the Pro Shop, then go to the Driving Range. Swap the golf balls for your bucket of fish, then hit fish into the water to create a path of alligators over to the Dunk The Beast tank. Save Max to get more Sasquatch Hair, then open the hatch to get a Snow Globe.



- 9** Return to the World's Largest Ball Of Twine, entering the museum at the bottom. Use the Severed Hand on the Golf Ball Retriever, then the Fridge Magnet on the Severed Hand – use all this on the Ball of Twine to find a Mood Ring hidden inside, then leave and drive over to the Mystery Vortex.



- 10** Step through the mirror to enter a room full of magnets – play with these to activate different exits until you meet Shuv-Oohl. Talk about Bruno, then give him the Mood Ring to get some Mystic Mole Man Powder. Go through the curtains to get more Sasquatch Hair before leaving again.

ROM SERVICE

OUR SEMI-REGULAR LOOK AT THE STATE OF EMULATION. THIS MONTH, WE REVEAL NINTENDO'S UNIQUE STRATEGY FOR CUTTING DOWN ON GAME BOY ADVANCE PIRACY

However you look at it, Nintendo's anti-piracy policy is far from discreet. The Japanese giant has already had a huge number of websites shut down for hosting illegal material, and even when it comes to borderline issues like importing, the firm has shown that it's not to be trifled with.

Nintendo's latest move to crack down on emulation is strangely ingenious – it has patented the idea of Game Boy Advance emulation. This means that any future GBA emulators on any platform will be infringing copyright and therefore illegal. As well as being a deterrent to PC users and coders, it will be particularly useful in preventing emulators appearing on mobile phones and PDAs, and even future consoles like the PSP.

THE POWER OF THE PATENT

The patent (number 6,672,963, fact fans) was actually filed four years ago by Patrick J. Link on behalf on Nintendo, but was only granted this January. "This invention relates to systems, methods, techniques, data structures, and other features for running software applications including but not limited to videogames on platforms different from the ones the software is intended or designed to run on," states the official US Patent Office record of Nintendo's 'invention', seemingly opening the floodgates for all manner of lawsuits against any program that it believes to be an infringement.

The first such project to be hit was Firestorm gbaZ, a GBA emulator for



the fledgling Tapwave Zodiac. Canadian developer Crimson Fire was sent a 'cease and desist' warning on the day the emulator was due to be shipped. Kyle Poole, head of the project, had to spread the bad news via the Crimson Fire forum.

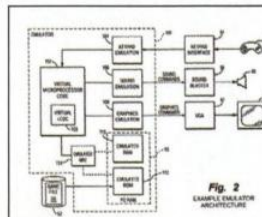
"Unfortunately, we have no choice but to hold off on the Firestorm release until we can consult a lawyer, and if we choose not to go ahead because of the big N, then we will of course refund everyone's money," he wrote. If this matter does end up

▼ The emulators created before the patent was granted should be unaffected by it, but future emulations may well land their creators in court.



FIGHT THE POWER

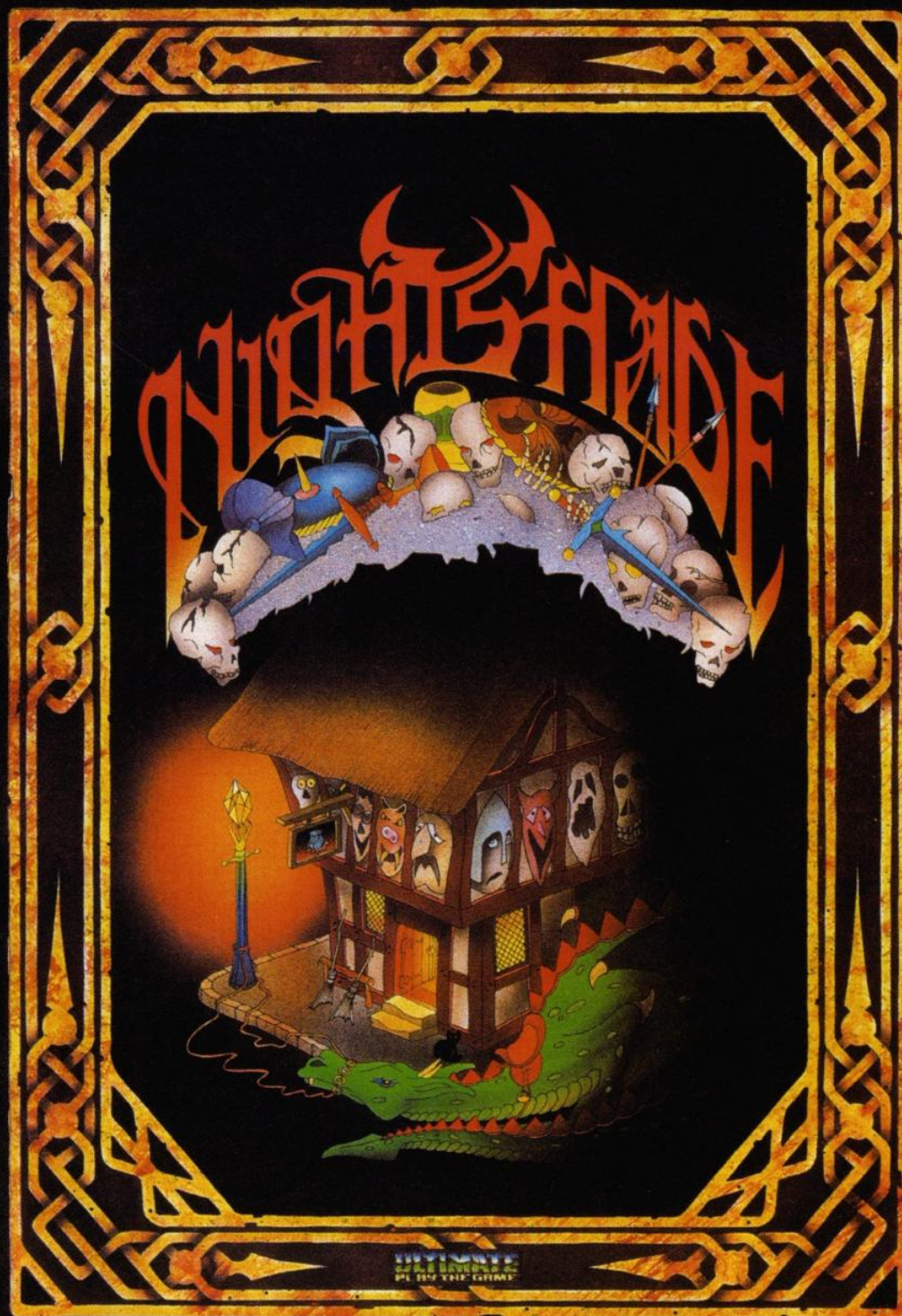
Despite now having legal grounds to close emulators, it remains to be seen whether Nintendo will try to shut down existing GBA emulators, which now number almost double figures. A loophole within the patent itself refers to emulators that can tailor the way they work depending on the ROM image used, something that applies more to the likes of the N64 emulator UltraHLE and excludes current GBA emulators. But while the wording may be slightly off, it's best to see this as a blanket warning from Nintendo.



going to court, the might of Nintendo is likely to prevail. Not only will it be able to argue copyright infringement, but also a patent violation for the act of emulation.

The patent is certainly a smart move by Nintendo, but could it be deemed an abuse of the US Patent system, a service put in place to protect new intellectual properties and promote originality? With the patent now in force this worry is irrelevant, but it will be interesting to see where the patent takes the grey area of emulation.

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VIEWPOINT BUJINGAI

Okay, so maybe games based around pop stars haven't done so well in the past, but then those games haven't been as frantic as *Bujingai* – sword-swinging fantasy action has never felt so right. Now we just have to hope that it comes out over here...



VIEWPOINT SOCOM II: NAVY SEALS

And so the PS2's online assault continues – albeit in the somewhat limited form of a single game. Apart from *Hardware*, this is the only title attracting many visitors as far as we can tell. Where are the killer online games, eh, Sony?



VIEWPOINT CHAMPIONS OF NORRATH

It looks like *Baldur's Gate*, it plays like *Baldur's Gate*... but it's not. Instead, this rather fun *EverQuest* offshoot has managed to provide us with plenty of enjoyment over the last month – especially when played as an Orc-slaying team.



PLAYSTATION2

MANUFACTURER Sony LAUNCH DATE 24 November 2000 MEDIA 4.75-inch DVD Disc CURRENT PRICE \$299.95



The oldest of the next-generation consoles, having had well over a year's head start over both the GameCube and Xbox. With support across the board from third-party developers, a built-in DVD player and backward compatibility with older PSone games, it's the most popular videogame console available today.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE PLAYSTATION2 GAMES

Title	Publisher	Developer	Comment
Amplitude	Sony	Harmonix	Music games have never needed as much skill as this
Beyond Good & Evil	Ubisoft	In-House	A fine example of adventuring; well worth the wait
Burnout 2: Point Of Impact	Acclaim	Criterion	Arcade racing at its purest – fun with a capital F
Colin McRae Rally 04	Codemasters	In-House	Realistic racing for the purist in all of us
Dark Chronicle	Sony	In-House	In-depth RPGs don't come much bigger than this
Devil May Cry	Capcom	In-House	The original is still the best by a long shot
Disgaea: Hour Of Darkness	Atlus	Nippon Ichi	Like your RPGs practically endless? Then this is for you
Freedom Fighters	Electronic Arts	Io Interactive	Top-notch squad-based action with an arcade twist
Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North	Enough content to keep you going for ages
Hitman 2: Silent Assassin	Eidos	Io Interactive	Silent but deadly – a real killer of a game
Ico	SCEE	In-House	Possibly the most beautiful game ever made
Metal Slug 3	IMPORT Playmore	In-House	Old-school shooting has never been so much fun
NBA Street 2	Electronic Arts	EA Sports BIG	The daddy of basketball games – no contest
Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time	Ubisoft	In-House	Ubisoft shows how to make a proper retro update
Pro Evolution Soccer 3	Konami	In-House	If you only own one football game, it should be this
Project Zero	Wanadoo	Tecmo	Scarier than anything else out there today
Rez	SEGA	UGA	Deceptively simple – draws you in before you know it
SSX 3	Electronic Arts	EA Sports BIG	The <i>Tony Hawk</i> of the snowboarding world
Suikoden III	IMPORT Konami	In-House	Konami's RPG series is still as good as it ever was
Tony Hawk's Underground	Activision	Neversoft	The defining moment in the <i>Tony Hawk</i> series

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN...

Ico

■ By now you should have realised that we're not going to stop telling you to buy *Ico*. It's a crime if you don't.



GTA: Vice City

■ Rockstar's free-roaming franchise just keeps on rolling. No doubt the twin pack will sell like mad...



Pro Evolution Soccer 3

■ Considering Konami's series exists, you have to wonder why other people keep making footy games.



Disgaea

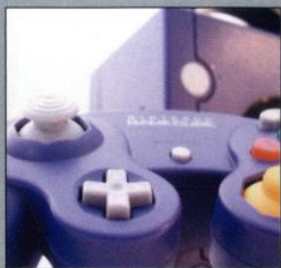
■ You know how we said that *Dark Chronicle* was big? Well, this is bigger. And now it's out over here... yay.



Dark Chronicle

■ Of course, PAL gamers can still take solace in the fact that Sony's epic RPG is pretty damn huge too.





XBOX

MANUFACTURER Microsoft **LAUNCH DATE** 14 March 2002 **MEDIA** 4.75-inch DVD Disc **CURRENT PRICE** \$249



Despite a slow start, the Xbox has swiftly become one of the major players in today's console market. Suggestions that the machine is only 'a PC in a box' are founded upon the built-in hard drive, broadband support and DVD player. However, the Xbox is far more accessible to gamers than most PCs.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE XBOX GAMES

Title	Publisher	Developer	Comment
Beyond Good & Evil	Ubisoft	In-House	A fine example of adventuring; well worth the wait
Burnout 2: Point Of Impact	Acclaim	Criterion Studios	Arcade racing at its purest – fun with a capital F
Colin McRae Rally 04	Codemasters	In-House	Realistic racing for the purist in all of us
Deus Ex: Invisible War	Eidos	Ion Storm	Freestyle adventuring with a decent first-person twist
Freedom Fighters	Electronic Arts	Io Interactive	Top-notch squad-based action with an arcade twist
Grand Theft Auto: Double Pack	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North	The best versions of <i>GTA III</i> and <i>Vice City</i> , without a doubt
Halo	Microsoft	Bungie	The game that sold a million Xbox consoles
Hitman 2: Silent Assassin	Eidos	Io Interactive	Silent but deadly – a real killer of a title
Jet Set Radio Future	SEGA	Smilebit	Cel-shading at its very best and a soundtrack to die for
Knights Of The Old Republic	Electronic Arts	BioWare	One of the best <i>Star Wars</i> games ever made
Moto GP	THQ	Climax	Bargain-priced motorbike racing action
Panzer Dragoon Orta	SEGA	Smilebit	Classic shoot-'em-up action, the SEGA way
Project Gotham Racing 2	Microsoft	Bizarre Creations	Redefining how we play games online
Project Zero	Microsoft	Tecmo	Scariest than anything else out there today
Rainbow Six 3	Ubisoft	In-House	Fairly decent action-strategy that comes alive online
Soul Calibur II	Namco	In-House	The leader of the pack when it comes to swordplay
Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow	Ubisoft	In-House	Even better than the original, with a storming Live mode
SSX 3	Electronic Arts	EA Sports BIG	The <i>Tony Hawk</i> of the snowboarding world
TimeSplitters 2	Eidos	Free Radical	More multiplayer fun than most other FPS games
Tony Hawk's Underground	Activision	Neversoft	The defining moment in the <i>Tony Hawk</i> series

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN...

Project Gotham Racing 2
■ We admit it – we're addicted to online racing. If only because it means we've got loads more friends.



GTA: Double Pack
■ Rockstar's belated release of the PS2's best-selling titles has 'value for money' written all over it.



Halo
■ Great AI, but is it really the best Xbox game ever? Hopefully, the arrival of the sequel will answer that.



Jet Set Radio Future
■ It might have a lot to answer for as far as cel-shading goes, but we still love a bit of graffiti.



Star Wars: KOTOR
■ Believe the hype – as long as you can take all the stats, this really is the best *Star Wars* game in ages.



VIEWPOINT

SPLINTER CELL: PANDORA TOMORROW

Oh, come on – did you really expect this much-anticipated sequel to not deliver the goods? Subtle tweaks to the single-player aside, this is all about the Live mode; you don't know fear until you've played us at it. Really.



VIEWPOINT

GRABBED BY THE GHOULES

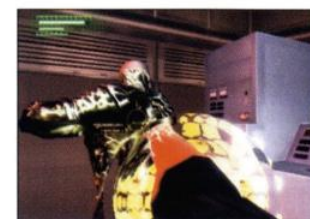
It might not have been the gut-busting humour fest that we'd hoped for from Rare, but returning to it this month has seen us still manage to get some laughs out of the company's first Xbox title.



VIEWPOINT

BREAKDOWN

We've spent much time with the import version of Namco's hybrid FPS fighting adventure... but that doesn't necessarily make it a good game. Innovation notwithstanding, it's a rather bland experience. We'll give you the full lowdown next issue.



ESSENTIALS

TOO MANY GAMES, NOT ENOUGH MONEY. THANKFULLY, NOT ALL OF THEM ARE WORTH SPENDING YOUR HARD-EARNED CASH ON. IF YOU WANT TO TASTE THE CREAM OF THE CROP, YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE...

GAMECUBE

MANUFACTURER Nintendo **LAUNCH DATE** 3 May 2002 **MEDIA** 3-inch Optical Disc **CURRENT PRICE** \$199.95



Though the GameCube seems destined to struggle, Nintendo's box of delights is still worth a look.

While third-party support is dwindling, it's the first-party releases that really offer some quality gaming. Nintendo still makes some of the finest games ever, so missing out isn't really an option.

VIEWPOINT

METAL GEAR SOLID: THE TWIN SNAKES

Don't believe the hype – it's not the best game for the GameCube ever. That said, though, it's definitely a solid update of an oldie-but-goodie title, and if you can get over how much it's aged you'll really enjoy it.



VIEWPOINT

RESIDENT EVIL

Would you believe it, but a recent run-in with Vivendi's upcoming *X-Files* game sent us running back to Capcom's treasured GameCube remake for comfort. Not that they're comparable in a quality sense, of course. If you haven't got it, you're missing out.



VIEWPOINT

VIEWTIFUL JOE

Just missing out on a nomination for graphical excellence in our awards, the news that Capcom's superhero title is coming to the PS2 means GameCube owners have only got a little time left to boast about Joe's excellence before it becomes open season.



TWENTY MUST-HAVE GAMECUBE GAMES

Title	Publisher	Developer	Comment
1080° Avalanche	Nintendo	In-House	A markedly different game to the competition
Animal Crossing	IMPORT Nintendo	In-House	The only game to keep us playing for a full year
Eternal Darkness	Nintendo	Silicon Knights	Scary in a different sense – very intriguing
Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles	Nintendo	Square-Enix	Different from the norm, with a distinct multiplayer flavour
F-Zero GX	Nintendo	Amusement Vision	SEGA does it again with a brilliant retro remake
Ikaruga	Treasure	In-House	Hard as nails and incredibly addictive
Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour	IMPORT Nintendo	Camelot	Golfing fun without the need for Tiger Woods
Mario Kart: Double Dash!!	Nintendo	In-House	Another great moment in gaming from Nintendo
Mario Party 5	Nintendo	In-House	Mini-game goodness, whether alone or with friends
Metal Gear Solid: The Twin Snakes	Konami	Silicon Knights	Hardly innovative, but still a great game in its own right
Metroid Prime	Nintendo	In-House	A genre-redefining title in every sense
Resident Evil	Capcom	In-House	Still as scary as it was when it first came out
Resident Evil Zero	Capcom	In-House	An interesting twist on the <i>Resident Evil</i> franchise
Soul Calibur II	Namco	In-House	The leader of the pack when it comes to swordplay
Star Wars: Rogue Leader	Activision	Factor 5	Forget the follow-up – the original still has the edge
Super Monkey Ball 2	SEGA	Amusement Vision	Monkeys and balls – what more could you want?
TimeSplitters 2	Eidos	Free Radical	More multiplayer fun than most other FPS games
Viewtiful Joe	Capcom	In-House	Looks great, plays even better
Winning Eleven 6	IMPORT Konami	In-House	The closest you'll get to <i>Pro Evolution</i>
Zelda: The Wind Waker	Nintendo	In-House	One of the many reasons to own a GameCube

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN...

Metroid Prime

■ The only game so far to score a perfect ten in the magazine – shouldn't that tell you something?



Zelda: The Wind Waker

■ Forget what people said about Link's new cel-shaded look being bad – they were wrong. Really wrong.



F-Zero GX

■ Faster than a speeding bullet? Oh yes. In fact, *F-Zero* is faster than a speeding bullet that's already late.



Winning Eleven 6: Final Evolution

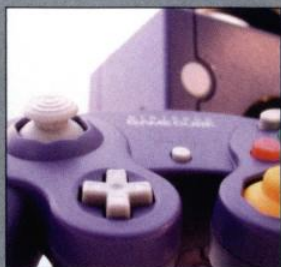
■ *Pro Evo's* never coming out on the Cube, so you'll have to make do with this.



Super Monkey Ball 2

■ Any game with monkeys in it is great – that's the law. But then we'd still love this even if we didn't have to.





GBA

MANUFACTURER Nintendo **LAUNCH DATE** 22 June 2001
MEDIA Flash Cartridge **CURRENT PRICE** \$199.95



Ideal for gaming on the move, the GBA is a cheap and effective way of getting games to those who don't have time to sit down and play. The leaps in handheld technology mean that GBA games are now more accomplished and can even be compared favourably to their console-based cousins. The lovely SP model is also available now in a variety of colours.

PC

MANUFACTURER N/A **LAUNCH DATE** N/A
MEDIA 4.75-inch CD/DVD Disc **CURRENT PRICE** \$Variable



While primarily bought as a work platform, the PC has swiftly become the haven of the more 'mature' gamer. With its natural ability for online and LAN play, it's perfectly tailored for the FPS, strategy and MMORPG genres. However, it can cost a fortune to keep a PC up to date and running fast enough to support flashy graphics.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE GAME BOY ADVANCE GAMES

Title	Publisher	Developer
Advance Wars 2	Nintendo	In-House
Boktai: The Sun Is In Your Hand	Konami	IMPORT In-House
Castlevania: Aria Of Sorrow	Konami	In-House
Final Fantasy Tactics Advance	Nintendo	Square-Enix
Fire Emblem	Nintendo	In-House
Golden Sun: The Lost Age	Nintendo	Camelot
Harvest Moon: Friends Of Mineral Town	Ubisoft	Natsume
Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga	Nintendo	AlphaDream
Medal Of Honor: Infiltrator	Electronic Arts	In-House
Metroid: Zero Mission	Nintendo	In-House
Pinball Challenge Deluxe	Ubisoft	Binary 9
Pokémon Pinball: Ruby And Sapphire	Nintendo	In-House
Pokémon Ruby / Sapphire	Nintendo	In-House
Speedball 2: Brutal Deluxe	Wanadoo	Crawfish
Street Fighter Alpha 3	Ubisoft	Crawfish
Super Mario Advance 3: Yoshi's Island	Nintendo	In-House
Super Mario Advance 4: SMB 3	Nintendo	In-House
Wario Ware Inc: Mega Microgame\$	Nintendo	In-House
Yu-Gi-Oh!: World Championship 2004	Konami	In-House
Zelda: A Link To The Past/Four Swords	Nintendo	In-House

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN...

Final Fantasy Tactics

■ So in-depth and absorbing that you'll end up losing more hours of your life than you'd care to think about...



Mario & Luigi

■ A genuinely fresh and playable Mario game that's not a remake of an old SNES title. Absolutely brilliant.



Zelda: Link To The Past

■ The SNES port is fantastic on its own, but combine that with Four Swords and you've got an unmissable title.



TWENTY MUST-HAVE PC GAMES

Title	Publisher	Developer
Battlefield Vietnam	EA	Digital Illusions
Call Of Duty	Activision	Infinity Ward
Championship Manager 03/04	Eidos	Sports Interactive
Day of Defeat	Activision	Valve Software
Deus Ex	Eidos	Ion Storm
FarCry	Ubisoft	Crytek
Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North
Grim Fandango	LucasArts	In-House
Half-Life	Vivendi	Valve Software
Hidden & Dangerous 2	Gathering	Illusion
Medieval: Total War	Activision	Creative Assembly
Operation Flashpoint	Codemasters	In-House
Pro Evolution Soccer 3	Konami	In-House
Rise Of Nations	Microsoft	Big Huge Games
Sam And Max Hit The Road	Activision	LucasArts
Sensible World Of Soccer	Sensible Software	Renegade
System Shock	EA	Looking Glass Games
The Sims	EA	Maxis
Tron 2.0	Buena Vista	Monolith
Unreal Tournament 2004	Atari	Epic Games

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN...

The Sims

■ Milked for all it's worth and yet still as great as it was when it first appeared. You've got to love The Sims.



Deus Ex

■ Freeform gaming as it was meant to be. If only all games were this way. We can't wait for the sequel to arrive.



GTA: Vice City

■ Looks better than its PS2 cousin and still has just as much 'cool' factor to keep PC gamers playing for ages.



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QUESTION OF THE MONTH: DO SONY AND NINTENDO ACTUALLY KNOW WHAT THEY'RE DOING? ANSWER: ERM... WE HOPE SO...

Portable gaming is already here, thanks to Nintendo. Will Sony 'do a PlayStation' with the PSP and knock over the dominant players with a bold new product and some slick marketing? Oh, and we talk about violence and graphics in games too. It's all here.



MAKING CONTACT

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☐ **IT SEEMS TO ME** that we humans spend a great deal of time playing games which require you to shoot, stab or generally hurt another person in order to complete the game. What happened to games like *Spyro*? For once, I would like to see more games that are innocent.

I am not saying that FPSs, RPGs or action games are not fun or do not have a place in our society; they are fun and they do have a place. But, let's face it, we expose our children to enough violence in everyday life. It's good to spend quality time playing a game with your child and it seems like E-rated games are hard to find. Thank heavens for *Mario*, *Spyro* and *Scooby Doo*! Let's make some more games truly rated 'E' for *everyone*.

Remember: the future of gaming is not the geriatric crowd, it's the newbies – and their needs are different than ours.

Kelly D

games™: Yes, there are a lot of guns and violence in games. But there are also plenty of puzzle, sports and RPG titles that contain no violence whatsoever, so we can't really agree with your argument. As we often find ourselves saying, publishers release games that the public demands, and, whatever your view of violent games, it seems that they're popular. That means that it's the parents, not

publishers, who should take responsibility for the games that their children are exposed to. And there are plenty of kiddy-friendly titles out there, it's just that we don't tend to review them as your average *Deus Ex* or *Pro Evo* fan probably isn't too interested in *Scooby Doo 2*.

☐ **AFTER SEEING THE** video of *Death Jr.* on the internet for the PSP, I was impressed – which is a first for Sony hardware. But if it's true that the PSP's power is almost that of the PS2, could Nintendo be in trouble? The huge PlayStation brand coming to the handheld market with growing support could be a big danger to Nintendo.

After hearing about the DS, I'm quite sceptical about what it is and how powerful it is – I've heard it's probably going to be as powerful as the Nintendo64, and I've also been hearing rumours about the possibility of the GBA2 also being released. If this is true, why is Nintendo going to be releasing two handhelds?

It seems like a big mistake and one which is reminiscent of the early Nineties when SEGA released the Mega CD, 32X and the Saturn, which confused the consumer and led to people losing faith in SEGA – the 32X and Mega CD were failures, while the Saturn only had real success in Japan, probably thanks to

"IT SEEMS TO ME THAT WE HUMANS SPEND A GREAT DEAL OF TIME PLAYING GAMES WHICH REQUIRE YOU TO SHOOT, STAB OR GENERALLY HURT ANOTHER PERSON"

Doom III. Pretty, isn't it? How much better can graphics get? How much better do they need to get?



the Segata Sanshirou ad campaign. Of course, this came back to haunt the Dreamcast, as many ignored it and waited for the PS2. So could Nintendo be doing a SEGA? Getting a bit too big for its boots and releasing a stopgap handheld such as the DS (which could have the same fate as the 32X) until the GBA2 or whatever it is arrives?

Mark, Warrington

games™: Stop with your worrying. We know very little of either the PSP or the Nintendo DS, so to be concerned for Nintendo and the future of its handhelds (and the whole company) seems a little premature. Nintendo has been in the console business long enough to know what it's doing, and come E3 (when we'll most likely see the PSP and DS) we may well be every bit as excited about the DS as some are over the PSP.

☐ **AS EACH GENERATION** of gaming machines arrives the graphical advances they've made amazes us. I'm sure I wasn't the only innocent child who said: "Wow, look at the amazing visuals on game 'X', how can they possibly improve on this?"

Obviously, you eventually learn that graphics are constantly improved thanks to those clever development people. However, Nintendo has recently said that graphics are reaching a plateau and that it would have to find other ways to enhance the gaming experience. At first, I brushed this off assuming this was a reason for the (now defunct) rumours that Nintendo would continue making games for the GameCube rather than release its new machine within the same time

frame as the other big players. However, I'm actually seeing Nintendo's point here.

Take, for example, the facial likenesses in football games. Sure they can be tightened up a little but they're damn good as they stand. In-game engines are verging on photo-realism, just look at *Doom III* and *Half-Life 2*! I can't see anything like a 2D-to-3D leap coming up on the horizon, so I'm tempted to agree with Nintendo. Do you think this is actually the case or am I turning into that small child again?

Bob Bailey

games™: Graphics will continue to improve – that's a given. People want photorealism and, on a more basic level, we like owning more and more powerful PCs and consoles (sad, but true). This drives hardware developers and it continues to keep graphics-card manufacturers in business. However, the point you make about Nintendo is an interesting one, especially as of all the games developers, Nintendo remains one of the most innovative. On the face of it, it sounds like a noble pledge from Nintendo. However, it's more likely a response to the fact that its current hardware simply isn't the most graphically capable machine on the market. We have yet to see the GameCube successfully innovate videogames in the way that the company suggested, but we live in hope – perhaps Nintendo will truly amaze us all (after all, if any company can keep us hoping, it's Nintendo).



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HIGHBURY-PARAGON LIMITED

Suite 303a, 275 Alfred St
North Sydney NSW 2009
Telephone: (02) 9460 4466
Fax: (02) 9460 4746

CUSTOMER SERVICES

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EDITORIAL

Group Editor
Michael Butler

Art Editor
Lee Diviny

Production Manager
Amanda Winton

Contributors
**Ryan King, Graeme Nicholson,
Tim Rogers, Ross Teagle,
Chandra Nair, Matt Hody,
Kendall Lacey**

ADVERTISING

Advertising Manager
Melody O'Gara

mogara@paragonpublishing.com.au
Telephone: (02) 9460 4524
Fax: (02) 9460 4746

PRODUCTION

Printed by Webstar
83 Derby Street
Silverwater NSW 2128
Telephone: (02) 9748 0020

DIRECTORS

Circulation and Marketing Director Australia
Steve Maidens

Managing Director Australia
Mike Frey

Finance Director
Steven Boyd

CEO
Mark Simpson

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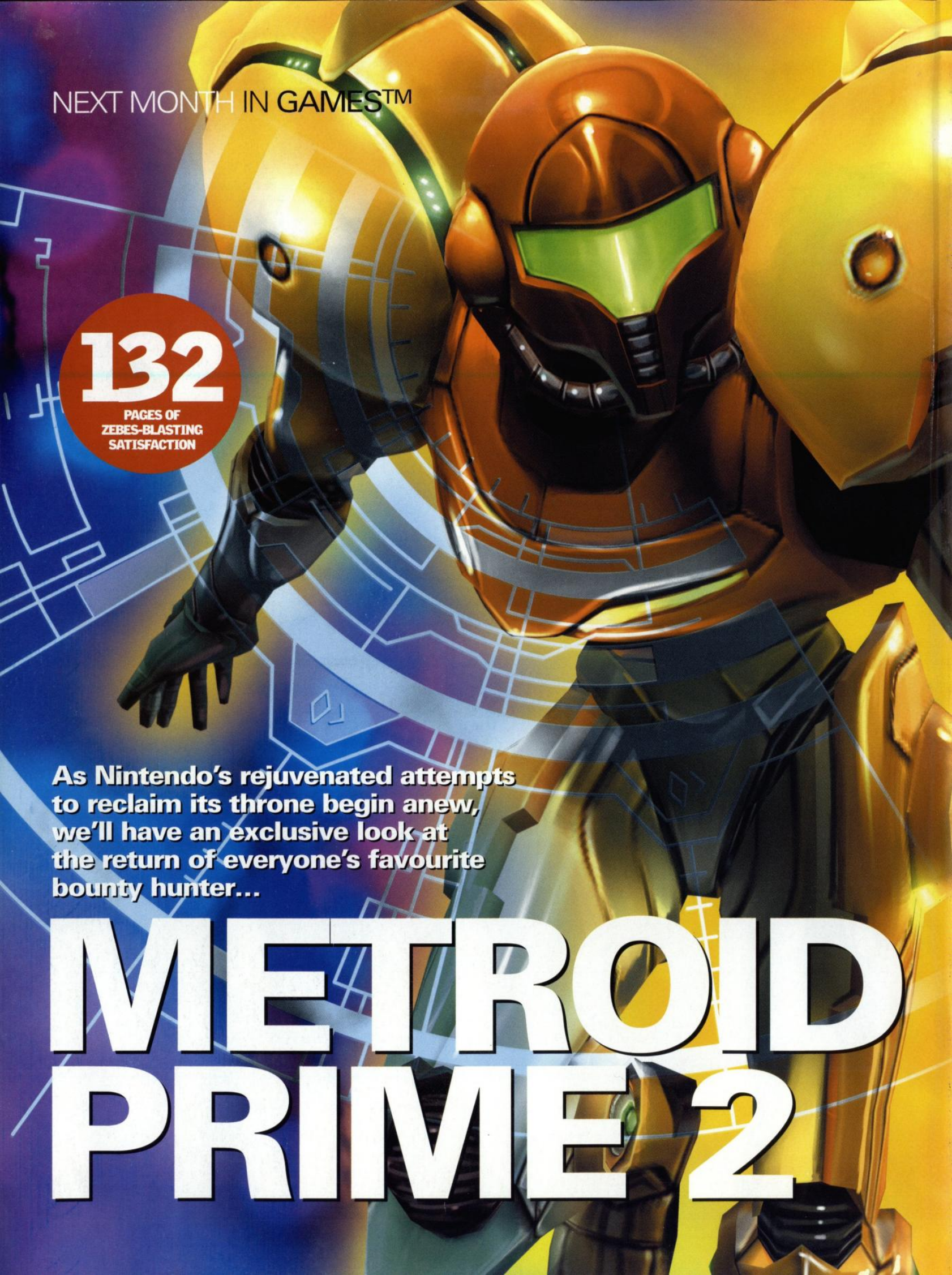
WORKSHOPS: EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

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PAGES OF
FIRE-SPRINKLING
ACTION



A close-up, dynamic shot of Samus Aran in her iconic orange Power Suit. She is positioned diagonally across the frame, with her right arm extended forward. The suit's visor is a bright green, and the armor has a metallic, reflective texture. The background is a dark blue and purple space with white geometric lines, suggesting a futuristic or alien environment.

NEXT MONTH IN GAMES™

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PAGES OF
ZEBES-BLASTING
SATISFACTION

As Nintendo's rejuvenated attempts to reclaim its throne begin anew, we'll have an exclusive look at the return of everyone's favourite bounty hunter...

METROID PRIME 2

NEXT MONTH

MORE... PREVIEWS

What will you be playing next Christmas? We'll answer that question thanks to a low-key event that we like to refer to as E3...

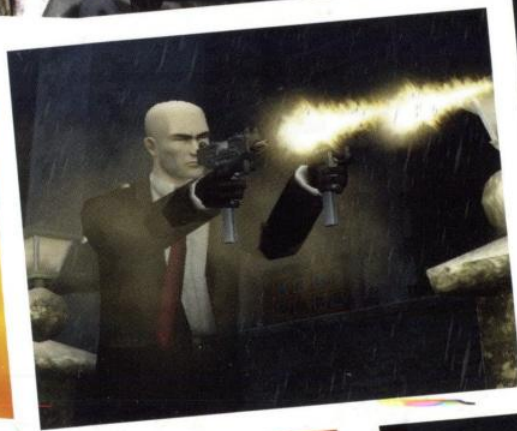
MORE... REVIEWS

You want games to get you through those spring months?

You've got them – *Hitman Contracts*, *Painkiller*, *Breakdown*, *Red Dead Revolver* and more besides.

MORE... FEATURES

We head to snowy Sweden to meet the people behind SEGA's *Headhunter* (and ask what the hell they've been doing for so long), finally have the chance to talk to Peter Molyneux, and take a long hard look at what the future might hold for Nintendo...



ON SALE
25 JUNE 04

Please note: Due to late code and unforeseen circumstances and stuff, we can't guarantee that the next issue will actually contain all these things. But it will definitely have something in it, like words and pictures and what have you.

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